AN

ESTIMATE

OF THE

RELIGION

OF THE

FASHIONABLE WORLD.

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RELIGION

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FASHIONABLE WORLD.

BY ONE OF THE LAITY.

There was never found, in any age of the world, either Philosophy, or Sect, or Religion, or Law, or Discipline, which did so highly exalt the public good as the Christian Faith. LORD BACON.

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AN

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INTRODUCTION.

THE general design of these pages is to offer some cursory remarks on the present state of religion among a great part of the polite and the fashionable; not only among that description of persons

who, whether from diſbelief, or whatever other cauſe, avowedly neglect the duties of Chriſtianity; but among that more decent claſs alſo, who, while they acknowledge their belief of its truth by a public profeſſion, and are not inattentive to any of its forms, yet exhibit little of its ſpirit in their general temper and conduct: to ſhew that Chriſtianity, like its divine Author, is not only *denied* by thoſe who in words diſown their ſubmiſſion to its authority; but *betrayed* by ſtill more treacherous diſciples, even while they ſay, *Hail, Maſter!*

For

For this viſible declenſion of piety various reaſons have been aſſigned, ſome of which however do not ſeem fully adequate to the effects aſcribed to them. The author of a late popular pamphlet * has accounted for the increaſed profligacy of the *common people*, by aſcribing it, very juſtly, to the increaſed diſſoluteneſs of their ſuperiors: and who will deny what he affirms—that the general conduct of high and low receives a deep tincture of depravity from the growing neglect of public worſhip? I muſt however take the liberty to

* *Hints to an Aſſociation, &c. &c.*

diſſent from his opinion as to the cauſe of that neglect; and to ſuſpect that the too commom deſertion of perſons of rank from the ſervice of the Eſtabliſhment is not occaſioned, in general, by their diſapprobation of the Liturgy; but that the far greater part of them are deterred from going to church by motives far removed from ſpeculative objections and conſcientious ſcruples.

Far be it from me to enter the unpleaſant and boundleſs fields of controverſy; an enterprize for which it would be hard to ſay whether I

have

have leſs ability or inclination. Far be it from me to ſtand forth the fierce champion of a Liturgy, or the prejudiced advocate of forms and ſyſtems. A ſincere member of the Eſtabliſhment myſelf, I reſpect its inſtitutions without idolatry, and acknowledge its imperfections without palliation.

But the difference of opinion here intimated is not ſo much about the Liturgy itſelf, as its imagined effects in thinning the pews of our people of faſhion. The ſlighteſt degree of obſervation ſeems to contradict this

aſſertion: thoſe however who maintain the other opinion may ſatisfy their doubts, by enquiring whether the regular and ſyſtematic abſenters from church are chiefly to be found among the thinking, the reading, the ſpeculative, and the ſcrupulous part of mankind.

Even the moſt negligent attendant on public worſhip muſt know, that the obnoxious creed, to whoſe malignant potency this general deſertion is aſcribed, is never read above three or four Sundays in a year; and that does not ſeem a very adequate

reaſon

reaſon for baniſhing the moſt ſcrupulous and tender conſciences from church on the other eight-and-forty Sundays.

Beſides, there is one teſt which is abſolutely unequivocal—it is never read at all in the *afternoon*, any more than the Litany (another great ſource of offence); and yet, with all theſe multiplied reaſons for their attendance, that is a ſeaſon when the pews of the faſhionable world are not *remarkable* for being crowded.

On the contrary, is it not pretty

evident that the general quarrel (with ſome few exceptions) of thoſe who habitually abſent themſelves from public worſhip, is not with the Creed, but the Commandments? With ſuch, to reform the Prayer Book would go but a little way, unleſs the New Teſtament could be alſo abridged. Cut, and pare, and prune the ſervice of the Church ever ſo much, ſtill Chriſtianity itſelf will be found full of formidable objections. With ſuch objectors, it would avail but little that the Church ſhould give up her abſtruſe creeds, unleſs the Bible would ex-

punge thoſe rigorous laws, which not only prohibit ſinful actions, but corrupt inclinations. And, to ſpeak honeſtly, I do not ſee how ſuch perſons as habitually infringe the laws of virtue and ſobriety, and who yet are men of acute ſagacity, accuſtomed on other ſubjects to a conſiſtent train of reaſoning; who ſee conſequences in their cauſes; who behold practical ſelf-denial neceſſarily involved in the ſincere habit of religious obſervances—I do not ſee how, to ſuch men, any doctrines reformed, any redundancies lopped, any obſcurities brightened, could

effect

effect this author's very benevolent and chriſtian wiſh.

For religious duties are often neglected upon more conſiſtent grounds than the friends of religion are willing to allow. They are often diſcontinued, not as repugnant to the underſtanding, not as repulſive to the judgment, but as hoſtile to a licentious life. And when a prudent man, after entering into a ſolemn convention, finds that he is living in a conſtant breach of every article of the treaty he has engaged to obſerve; one cannot much wonder at his getting

ting out of the hearing of the heavy artillery which he knows is planted againſt him, and againſt every one who lives in an allowed infraction of the covenant.

A man of ſenſe, who ſhould acknowledge the truth of the doctrine, would find himſelf obliged to ſubmit to the force of the precept. It is not eaſy to be a comfortable ſinner, without trying, at leaſt, to be a confirmed unbeliever. The ſmalleſt remains of faith would embitter a life of libertiniſm; and to him who retains any impreſſion of Chriſtianity, the

the wildeſt feſtivals of intemperance will be converted into the terrifying feaſt of Damocles: the ſuſpended ſword may every moment fall.

That many a worthy nonconformiſt is kept out of the pale of the Eſtabliſhment by ſome of the cauſes noticed in the pamphlet in queſtion, cannot be doubted; and that many candid members of that Eſtabliſhment regret the cauſes which exclude the others, cannot be denied. But theſe are often ſober thinkers, ſerious enquirers, conſcientious reaſoners; whoſe object is truth,

truth, and who ſpare no pains in ſearch of what they take to *be* truth. But that the ſame objections baniſh the great and the gay, is not equally evident. Thanks to the indolence and diſſipation of the times, it is not dogmas or doctrines, it is not abſtract reaſoning or puzzling propoſitions, it is not perplexed argument or intricate metaphyſics, which can now diſincline from Chriſtianity; ſo far from it, they cannot even allure to unbelief. Infidelity itſelf, with all that ſtrong and natural bias which paſſion and appetite have in its favour, if it appear in the grave and

ſcholaſtic

ſcholaſtic form of ſpeculation, argument, or philoſophical deduction, may lie almoſt as quietly on the ſhelf as its moſt able antagoniſt; and the cobwebs are almoſt as ſeldom bruſhed from Hobbes as from Hooker. No: prudent ſcepticiſm has wiſely ſtudied the temper of the times, and ſkilfully felt the pulſe of this relaxed and indolent age. It prudently accommodated itſelf to the reigning character, when it adopted ſarcaſm inſtead of reaſoning, and preferred a ſneer to an argument. It diſcreetly judged, that, if it would now gain proſelytes, it muſt

ſhew

ſhew itſelf under the bewitching form of a profane bon-mot; muſt be interwoven in the texture of ſome amuſing hiſtory, written with the levity of a romance, and the point and glitter of an epigram: it muſt embelliſh the ample margin with ſome offenſive anecdote or impure alluſion, and decorate impiety with every looſe and meretricious ornament of a corrupt imagination: it muſt break up the old flimſy ſyſtem into little miſchievous aphoriſms, ready for practical purpoſes: it muſt divide the rope of ſand into little portable parcels, which the ſhallow-

eſt wit can comprehend, and the ſhorteſt memory carry away.

Philoſophy therefore (as Unbelief, by a patent of its own creation, has lately been pleaſed to call itſelf) will not do nearly ſo much miſchief to the preſent age, as its great apoſtles intended: ſince it requires time, application, and patience to peruſe the reaſoning veterans of the ſceptic ſchool: and theſe are talents not now very ſeverely devoted to ſtudy of any ſort, by thoſe who give the law to faſhion; eſpecially ſince, as it was hinted above, the ſame princi-

ples

ples may be acquired on cheaper terms, and the reputation of being philoſophers obtained without the ſacrifices of pleaſure for the ſeverities of ſtudy; ſince the induſtry of our literary chemiſts has extracted the ſpirit from the groſs ſubſtance of the old unvendible poiſon, and exhibited it in the volatile eſſence of a few ſprightly ſayings.

If therefore, in this voluptuous age, when a frivolous and relaxing diſſipation has infected our very ſtudies, infidelity will not be at the pains of deep reſearch and elaborate inveſtigation, even on ſuch ſubjects

as are congenial to its affections; it is vain to expect that chriſtianity will be more engaging, either as an object of ſpeculation, or a rule of practice, when its evidences require attention to be comprehended, its doctrines humility to be received, and its precepts ſelf-denial to be embraced.

Will it then be uncharitable to pronounce that the leading evil, not which thins our churches (for that is not the evil I propoſe to conſider), but which pervades our whole character, and gives the colour to our

general conduct, is *practical irreligion?* an irreligion not ſo much oppoſed to a ſpeculative faith, as to that ſpirit, temper, and behaviour which chriſtianity inculcates.

On this practical irreligion it is propoſed to offer a few hints. After attempting to ſhew, by a compariſon with the religion of the great in preceding ages, that there is a viſible decline of piety among the higher ranks—that even thoſe more liberal ſpirits who neglect not many of the great duties of benevolence, yet hold the ſeverer obligations of piety

in no eſteem—I ſhall proceed, though perhaps with too little method, to remark on the notorious *effects* of the decay of this religious principle, as it corrupts our mode of education, infects domeſtic conduct, ſpreads the contagion downwards among ſervants and inferiors, and influences our manners, habits, and converſation.

But what it is here propoſed principally to inſiſt on is, that this defect of religious principle is almoſt equally fatal, whether it appear in the open contempt of all ſacred inſtitutions,

ſtitutions, or under the more decent veil of external obſervances, unſupported by ſuch a conduct as is analogous to the chriſtian profeſſion.

I ſhall proceed with a few remarks on a third claſs of faſhionable characters, who profeſs to acknowledge chriſtianity as a perfect ſyſtem of morals, while they deny its divine authority: and conclude with ſome ſlight animadverſions on the opinion which theſe maintain, that morality is the whole of religion.

It muſt be confeſſed, however, that manners and principles act re-

ciprocally on each other; and are, by turns, cauſe and effect. For inſtance—the increaſed relaxation of morals produces the increaſed neglect of infuſing religious principles in the education of youth: which effect becomes, in its turn, a cauſe; and in due time, when that cauſe comes to operate, helps on the decline of manners.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

Decline of chriſtianity ſhewn by a comparative view of the religion of the great in preceding ages.

IF the general poſition of this little tract be allowed, namely, that religion is at preſent in no very flouriſhing ſtate among thoſe, whoſe example, from the high ground on which they ſtand, guides and governs the reſt of mankind;

it will not be denied by thoſe, who are ever ſo ſuperficially acquainted with the hiſtory of our country, that this has not always been the caſe. Thoſe who make a fair compariſon muſt allow, that however the preſent age may be improved in other important and valuable advantages, yet that there is but little appearance remaining among the great and the powerful of that "righteouſneſs which exalteth a nation;"—that there has been a *moral revolution* in the national manners and principles, very little analogous to that great *political* one of which

which we hear ſo much; that our public virtue bears little proportion to our public bleſſings; and that our religion has decreaſed in a pretty exact proportion to our having ſecured the means of enjoying it.

That the antipodes to wrong are hardly ever right, was very ſtrikingly illuſtrated about the middle of the laſt century, when the fiery and indiſcreet zeal of one party was made a pretext for the profligate impiety of the other; who, to the bad principle which dictated a depraved conduct, added the bad taſte of being proud

proud of it:—when even the leaſt abandoned were abſurdly apprehenſive that an appearance of decency might ſubject them to the charge of fanaticiſm, a charge in which they took care to involve real piety as well as enthuſiaſtic pretence; till it became the general faſhion to avoid no ſin but hypocriſy, to dread no imputation but that of ſerioufneſs, and to be more afraid of a good reputation than of every vice which ever earned a bad one.

It was not till piety was thus unfor-

fortunately brought into diſrepute, that perſons of condition thought it made their ſincerity, their abilities, or their good breeding queſtionable, to appear openly on the ſide of religion. A ſtrict attachment to piety did not ſubtract from a great reputation. Men were not thought the worſe lawyers, generals, miniſters, legiſlators, or hiſtorians, for believing, and even defending, the religion of their country. The gallant Sir Philip Sidney, the raſh but heroic Eſſex, the politic and ſagacious Burleigh, the all-accompliſhed Falkland,

land *, not only publicly owned their belief in chriſtianity, but even wrote ſome things of a religious nature †. Theſe inſtances, and many others which might be adduced, are not, it will be allowed, ſelected from among contemplative recluſes, grave divines, or authors by profeſſion; but from buſy men

* Lord Falkland aſſiſted the great Chillingworth in his incomparable work, The Religion of a Proteſtant.

† See that equally elegant and authentic work, *The Anecdotes of Royal and Noble Authors.*

of ſtrong paſſions, beſet with great temptations; diſtinguiſhed actors on the ſtage of life; and whoſe reſpective claims to the title of fine gentlemen, brave ſoldiers, or able ſtateſmen, have never been called in queſtion.

What would the Hales, and the Clarendons, and the Somers's * have ſaid, had they been told that the

* This conſummate ſtateſman was not only remarkable for a ſtrict attendance on the public duties of religion, but for maintaining them with equal exactneſs in his family, at a period too when religion was moſt diſcountenanced.

time

time was at no great diſtance, when that ſacred book, for which they thought it no derogation from their wiſdom or their dignity to entertain the profoundeſt reverence, would be of little more uſe to men in high public ſtations, than to be the inſtrument of an oath; and that the ſubliméſt rites of the chriſtian religion would ſoon be conſidered as little more than a neceſſary qualification for a place, or the legal preliminary to an office.

This indeed is the boaſted period of free enquiry and liberty of thinking,

ing, and a noble ſubject of boaſting it is. But it is the peculiar character of the preſent age, that its miſchiefs often aſſume the moſt alluring forms: and that the moſt alarming evils not only look ſo like goodneſs as to be often miſtaken for it; but are ſometimes mixed up with ſo much real good, as often to diſguiſe, though never to counteract, their malignity. Under the beautiful maſk of an enlightened philoſophy, all religious reſtraints are ſet at nought; and ſome of the deadlieſt wounds have been aimed at chriſtianity, in works written in avowed vindication of

the

the moſt amiable of all the chriſtian principles *. Even the prevalence of a liberal and warm philanthropy

* See particularly *Voltaire ſur la Tolerance.* This is a common artifice of that engaging but inſidious author. In this inſtance he has made uſe of the popularity he obtained in the fanatical tragedy at Thoulouſe (the murder of Calas) to diſcredit, though in the moſt guarded manner, chriſtianity itſelf; degrading martyrdoms, denying the truth of the Pagan perſecutions, &c. &c. And by mixing ſome truths with many falſehoods, by aſſuming an amiable candour, and profeſſing to ſerve the intereſts of goodneſs, he treacherouſly contrives to leave on the mind of the unguarded reader impreſſions the moſt unfavourable to chriſtianity.

is ſecretly ſapping the foundation of chriſtian morals, becauſe many of its champions allow themſelves to live in the open violation of the ſeverer duties of juſtice and ſobriety, while they are contending for the gentler ones of charity and beneficence.

The ſtrong and generous bias in favour of univerſal toleration, noble as the principle itſelf is, has engendered a dangerous notion that all error is innocent. Whether it be owing to this, or to whatever other cauſe, it is certain that the diſcrimi-

nating features of the chriſtian religion are every day growing into leſs repute; and it is become the faſhion, even among the better ſort, to evade, to lower, or to generalize, its moſt diſtinguiſhing peculiarities *.

* There is ſo little of the Author of chriſtianity left in his own religion, that an apprehenſive believer is ready to exclaim, with the woman at the ſepulchre, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." The locality of Hell, and the exiſtence of an Evil Spirit, are annihilated, or conſidered as abſtract ideas. They are never named without ſome periphraſis or circumlocution; as if the very names, inſtead of being awful and terrible, were only vulgar and illiberal.

Having wiſely and happily freed ourſelves from the trammels of human authority, are we not turning our liberty into licentiouſneſs, and wantonly ſtruggling to throw off the *divine* authority too? Freedom of thought is the glory of the human mind, while it is confined within its juſt and ſober limits; but though we are accountable for *opinions* at no earthly tribunal, yet it ſhould be remembered that thoughts as well as actions are amenable to the bar of God: and though we may rejoice that the tyranny of the ſpiritual Procruſtes is ſo far annihilated, that

it is no longer thought a proof of the orthodoxy of one man's opinions, that he lop or lengthen thoſe of another till they fit his own meaſure; yet there is ſtill a ſtandard by which not only actions are weighed, but opinions are judged; and every ſentiment which is clearly inconſiſtent with the revealed will of God, is as much throwing off *his* dominion, as the breach of any of his moral precepts.

There is then ſurely one teſt by which it is no mark of intolerance to try the principles of men, namely, the

the *Law and the Teſtimony:* and it is impoſſible not to lament, that, while a more generous ſpirit governs our judgment, a purer principle does not ſeem to regulate our lives. May it not be ſaid, that, while we are juſtly commended for thinking charitably of the opinions of others, we ſeem, in return, as if we were deſirous of furniſhing them with an opportunity of exerciſing their candour, by the laxity of principle in which we indulge ourſelves? If the hearts of men were as firmly united to each other by the bond of charity, as ſome pretend, they could not fail of being

united to God alſo, by one common principle of piety, the only certain ſource of all charitable judgment, as well as of all virtuous conduct.

Inſtead of abiding by the ſalutary precept of *judging no man*, it is the faſhion to exceed our commiſſion, and to fancy every body to be in a ſafe ſtate. But, in forming our notions, we have to chooſe between the Bible and the world, between the rule and the practice. Where theſe do not agree, it is left to the judgment, of believers at leaſt, by which we are to decide. But we never

never act, in religious concerns, by the ſame rule of common ſenſe and equitable judgment which governs us on other occaſions. In weighing any commodity, its weight is determined by ſome generally-allowed ſtandard; and if the commodity be heavier or lighter then the ſtandard weight, we add to or take from it: but we never break, or clip, or reduce the weight to ſuit the thing we are weighing; becauſe the common conſent of mankind has agreed that the one ſhall be conſidered as the ſtandard to aſcertain the value of the other. But, in weighing our prin-

ciples by the ſtandard of the Goſpel, we do juſt the reverſe. Inſtead of bringing our opinions and actions to the *balance of the ſanctuary*, to determine and rectify their comparative deficiencies, we lower and reduce the ſtandard of the ſcripture doctrines till we have accommodated them to our own purpoſes; ſo that, inſtead of trying others and ourſelves by God's unerring rule, we try the truth of God's rule by its conformity or non-conformity to our own depraved notions and corrupt practices.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Benevolence allowed to be the reigning virtue, but not excluſively *the virtue of the preſent age—Benevolence not the whole of religion, though one of its moſt characteriſtic features. Whether benevolence proceed from a religious principle will be more infallibly known by the general diſpoſition of time, fortune, and the common habits of life, than from a few occaſional acts of bounty.*

TO all the remonſtrance and invective of the preceding chapter, there will not fail to be oppoſed that

that which we hear every day ſo loudly inſiſted on—the decided ſuperiority of the preſent age, in other and better reſpects. It will be ſaid that even thoſe who neglect the outward forms of religion, exhibit however the beſt proofs of the beſt principles; that the unparalleled inſtances of charity of which we are continual witneſſes; that the many ſtriking acts of public bounty, and the various new and noble improvements in this ſhining virtue, juſtly entitle the preſent age to be called, by way of eminence, *the age of benevolence*.

It is with the livelieſt joy I acknowledge the delightful truth. Liberality flows with a full tide through a thouſand channels. There is ſcarcely a newſpaper but records ſome meeting of men of fortune for the moſt ſalutary purpoſes. The noble and numberleſs ſtructures for the relief of diſtreſs, which are the ornament and the glory of our metropolis, proclaim a ſpecies of munificence unknown to former ages. Subſcriptions, not only to hoſpitals, but to various other valuable inſtitutions, are obtained almoſt as ſoon as ſolicited. And who but muſt

wiſh

wiſh that theſe beautiful monuments of benevolence may become every day more numerous, and more extended?

Yet, with all theſe allowed and obvious excellencies, it is not quite clear whether ſomething too much has not been ſaid of the liberality of the preſent age, in a comparative view with that of thoſe ages which preceded it. A general alteration of habits and manners has at the ſame time multiplied public bounties and private diſtreſs; and it is ſcarcely a paradox to ſay, that there

was

was probably leſs miſery when there was leſs munificence.

If an increaſed benevolence now ranges through and relieves a wider compaſs of diſtreſs; yet ſtill, if thoſe examples of luxury and diſſipation which promote that diſtreſs are ſtill *more* increaſed, this makes the good done bear little proportion to the evil promoted. If the miſeries removed by the growth of charity fall, both in number and weight, far below thoſe which are cauſed by the growth of vice and diſorder; if we find that, though bounty is extended,

yet

yet thoſe corruptions which make bounty ſo neceſſary are extended alſo, almoſt beyond calculation; if it appear that, though more objects are relieved by our money, yet incomparably more are debauched by our licentiouſneſs—the balance perhaps will not turn out ſo decidedly in favour of the times as we are willing to imagine.

If then the moſt valuable ſpecies of charity is that which prevents diſtreſs by preventing or leſſening vice, the greateſt and moſt inevitable cauſe of want; we ought not ſo highly

highly to exalt the bounty of the great in the preſent day, in preference to that broad ſhade of protection, patronage, and maintenance, which the wide-ſpread bounty of their forefathers ſtretched out over whole villages, I had almoſt ſaid whole provinces. When a few noblemen in a county, like a few of their own ſtately oaks (paternal oaks! which were not often ſet upon a card), extended their ſheltering branches to ſhield all the underwood of the foreſt—when there exiſted a kind of paſſive charity, a negative ſort of benevolence, which did good

of

of itſelf; and without effort, exertion, or expence, performed the beſt functions of bounty, though it did not aſpire to the dignity of its name—it was ſimply this:—great people ſtaid at home; and the ſober pomp and orderly magnificence of a noble family, reſiding at their own caſtle great part of the year, contributed in the moſt natural way to the maintenance of the poor; and in a good degree prevented that diſtreſs, which it muſt however thankfully be confeſſed it is the laudable object of modern bounty to relieve. A man of fortune might not then, it is true,

ſo

ſo often dine in public, for the benefit of the poor; but the poor were more regularly and comfortably fed with the abundant crumbs which then fell from the rich man's table. Whereas it cannot be denied that the prevailing mode of living has pared real hoſpitality to the very quick; and, though the remark may be thought ridiculous, it is a material diſadvantage to the poor, that the introduction of the modern ſtyle of luxury has rendered the remains of the moſt coſtly table but of ſmall value.

But even allowing the boaſted ſuperiority of modern benevolence, ſtill it will not be inconſiſtent with the object of the preſent deſign, to enquire whether the diffuſion of this branch of charity, though the moſt lovely offspring of religion, be yet any poſitive proof of the prevalence of religious principle; and whether it is not the faſhion rather to conſider benevolence as a ſubſtitute for chriſtianity, than as an evidence of it.

For it ſeems to be one of the reigning errors among the better ſort, to reduce all religion into benevolence,

volence, and all benevolence into alms-giving. The wide and comprehenſive idea of chriſtian charity is compreſſed into the ſlender compaſs of a little pecuniary relief. This ſpecies of benevolence is indeed a bright gem among the ornaments of a chriſtian; but by no means furniſhes all the jewels of his crown, which derives its luſtre from the aſſociated radiance of every chriſtian grace. Beſides, the genuine virtues are all of the ſame family; and it is only by being ſeen in company with each other, and with Piety their common parent, that they are certainly known

to be legitimate; for there are ſuch things as even ſpurious virtues.

But it is the property of the *chriſtian* virtues, that, like all other amiable members of the ſame family, while each is doing its own particular duty, it is contributing to the proſperity of the reſt; and the larger the family the better they live together, as no one can advance itſelf without labouring for the advancement of the whole: thus, no man can be benevolent on chriſtian principles, without ſelf-denial; and ſo of the other virtues: each is connected with

with ſome other, and all with religion.

I already anticipate the obvious and hackneyed reply, that "whoever be the inſtrument, and whatever be the motive of bounty, ſtill the poor are equally relieved, and therefore the end is the ſame." And it muſt be confeſſed that thoſe compaſſionate hearts, who cannot but be earneſtly anxious that the diſtreſſed ſhould be relieved at any rate, ſhould not too ſcrupulouſly enquire into any cauſe of which the effect is ſo beneficial. Nor indeed

will candour ſcrutinize too curiouſly into the errors of any life, of which benevolence will always be allowed to be a ſhining ornament, while it does not pretend to be an atoning virtue.

Let me not be miſrepreſented, as if I were ſeeking to detract from the value of this amiable feeling; one does not ſurely lower the practice by ſeeking to ennoble the principle; the action will not be impaired by mending the motive: and no one will be likely to give the poor leſs becauſe he ſeeks to pleaſe God more.

One

One cannot then help wiſhing that pecuniary bounty were not only not practiſed, but that it were not ſometimes enjoined too, as a redeeming virtue. In many converſations, I had almoſt ſaid in many charity ſermons, it is inſinuated as if a little alms-giving could pay off old ſcores contracted by favourite indulgences. This, though often done by well-meaning men to advance the intereſts of ſome preſent pious purpoſe, yet has the miſchievous effect of thoſe medicines which, while they may relieve a local complaint, are yet undermining the general habit.

That great numbers who are not influenced by ſo high a principle as chriſtianity holds out, are yet truly compaſſionate, without hypocriſy, and without oſtentation, who can doubt? ſince there are by nature many tender hearts; for did not God make them? and is he not the Author of all that is good in nature, as well as in grace?

But who that feels the beauty of benevolence, can avoid being ſolicitous, not only that its offerings ſhould comfort the receiver, but return in bleſſings to the boſom of the giver,

giver, by ſpringing from ſuch motives, and being accompanied by ſuch a temper, as ſhall redound to his eternal good? For that the benefit is the ſame to the object, whatever be the character of the benefactor, is but an uncomfortable view of things to a real chriſtian, whoſe compaſſion reaches to the ſouls of men. Such a one longs to ſee the charitable giver as happy as he is endeavouring to make the object of his bounty; but ſuch a one knows that no happineſs can be fully and finally enjoyed but on the ſolid baſis of chriſtian piety.

For

For as religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a ſentiment; ſo neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance; but it is a diſpoſition, a habit, a temper: it is not a name, but a nature: it is a turning the whole mind to God; a concentration of all the powers and affections of the ſoul into one ſteady point, an uniform deſire to pleaſe *Him*. This deſire will naturally and neceſſarily manifeſt itſelf, in our doing all the good we can to our fellow-creatures in every poſſible way; for it will be found that neither of the two parts into which

prac-

practical religion is divided, can be performed with any degree of perfection but by thoſe who unite both: as it may be queſtioned if any man really *does* "love his neighbour as himſelf," who does not firſt endeavour to "love God with all his heart." As genius has been defined to be ſtrong general powers of mind accidentally determined to ſome particular purſuit; ſo piety may be denominated a ſtrong general diſpoſition of the heart to every thing that is right, breaking forth into every excellent action, as the occaſion preſents itſelf. The temper

muſt

muſt be ready in the mind, and the whole heart muſt be prepared and trained to every act of virtue to which it may be called out. For religious principles are like the military exerciſe; they keep up an habitual ſtate of preparation for actual ſervice; and, by never relaxing the diſcipline, the real chriſtian is ready for every duty to which he may be commanded. Right actions beſt prove the exiſtence of religion in the heart; but they are evidences, not cauſes.

Whether therefore a man's charitable

table actions proceed from religious principle, he will be beſt able to aſcertain by ſcrutinizing into what is the general diſpoſition of his time and fortune; and by attending to ſuch an habitual regulation of his pleaſures and expences as will enable him to be more or leſs uſeful to others.

For it is in vain that he may poſſeſs what is called by the courteſy of faſhion *the beſt heart in the world* (a character we every day hear applied to the libertine and the prodigal), if he ſquander his time and eſtate

eſtate in ſuch a round of extravagant indulgences, and thoughtleſs diſſipation, as leaves him little money and leſs leiſure for nobler purpoſes. It makes but little difference whether a man is prevented from doing good by hard-hearted parſimony or an unprincipled extravagance; the ſtream is equally cut off.

The mere *caſual* benevolence of any man can have little claim to ſolid eſteem; nor does any charity deſerve the name, which does not grow out of a ſteady conviction that it is his bounden duty; which does

not ſpring from a ſettled propenſity to obey the whole will of God; which is not therefore made a part of the general plan of his conduct; and which does not lead him to order the whole ſcheme of his affairs with an eye to it.

He therefore who does not habituate himſelf to certain interior reſtraints, who does not live in a regular courſe of ſelf-renunciation, will not be likely often to perform acts of beneficence, when it becomes neceſſary to convert to ſuch purpoſes any of that time or money which

appetite,

appetite, temptation, or vanity ſolicit him to divert to other purpoſes.

And ſurely he who ſeldom ſacrifices one darling indulgence, who does not ſubtract one gratification from the inceſſant round of his enjoyments, when the indulgence would obſtruct his capacity of doing good, or when the ſacrifice would enlarge his power, does not deſerve the name of benevolent. And for ſuch an unequivocal criterion of charity to whom are we to look, but to the conſcientious chriſtian? No other ſpirit but that by which he is governed,

verned, can ſubdue ſelf-love: and where ſelf-love is the predominant paſſion, benevolence can have but a feeble, or an accidental dominion.

Now if we look around, and remark the exceſſes of luxury, the coſtly diverſions, and the intemperate diſſipation in which numbers of profeſſing chriſtians indulge themſelves, can any ſtretch of candour, can even that tender ſentiment by which we are enjoined "to hope" and to "believe all things," enable us to hope and believe that ſuch are actuated by a ſpirit of chriſtian bene-

volence, merely becauſe we ſee them perform ſome caſual acts of charity, which the ſpirit of the world can contrive to make extremely compatible with a voluptuous life; and the coſt of which, after all, bears but little proportion to that of any one vice, or even vanity?

Men will not believe that there is hardly any one human good quality which will know and keep its proper bounds, without the reſtraining influence of religious principle. There is, for inſtance, great danger leſt a conſtant attention to ſo right a practice

tice as an invariable œconomy, ſhould incline the heart to the love of money. Nothing can effectually counteract this natural propenſity but the chriſtian habit of devoting thoſe retrenched expences to ſome good purpoſe; and then œconomy, inſtead of narrowing the heart, will enlarge it, by inducing a conſtant aſſociation of benevolence with frugality. An habitual attention to the wants of others is the only wholeſome regulator of our own expences; and carries with it a whole train of virtues, diſintereſtedneſs, ſobriety and temperance. And thoſe who live

in the cuſtom of levying conſtant taxes on their vanities for ſuch purpoſes, ſerve the poor ſtill leſs than they ſerve themſelves, by cultivating ſuch habits as make the beſt qualification for their final happineſs.

Thus when a vein of chriſtianity runs through the whole maſs of a man's life, it gives a new value to all his actions, and a new character to all his views. It tranſmutes prudence and œconomy into chriſtian virtues; and every offering that is preſented on the altar of charity becomes truly conſecrated, when it

is

is the gift of obedience, and the price of ſelf-denial. Piety is the fire from heaven, which can alone kindle the ſacrifice, and make it acceptable.

On the other hand, when any act of bounty is performed by way of compoſition with one's Maker, either as a purchaſe, or an expiation of unallowed indulgences; though, even in this caſe, God (who makes all the paſſions of men ſubſervient to his good purpoſes) can make the gift equally beneficial to the receiver; yet it is ſurely not too ſevere

to ſay, that to the giver ſuch acts are an unfounded dependance, a deceitful refuge, a broken ſtaff.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

The neglect of religious education both a cause and consequence of the decline of christianity. No moral restraints—Religion only incidentally taught, not as a principle of action. A few of the causes which dispose the young to entertain low opinions of religion.

LET not the truly serious be offended, as if, in the present chapter, which is intended to treat of the notorious neglect of religious

education, I meant to confine the ſpirit of chriſtianity to merely mechanical effects, and to ſuppoſe that piety muſt be the natural and inevitable conſequence of early inſtitution. To imply this, would be indeed to betray a lamentable ignorance of human nature, of the diſorder ſin has introduced, of the inefficacy of human means, and entirely to miſtake the genius of our religion. It would be to ſuppoſe that God was to depend upon *our* goodneſs, and not we upon *his*.

Yet it muſt be allowed that the Supreme

Supreme Being works chiefly by means; and though it is confeſſed that no defect of education, no corruption of manners, can place any one out of the reach of the divine influences (for it is under ſuch circumſtances, perhaps, that the moſt extraordinary inſtances of divine grace have been manifeſted); yet it muſt be owned that early ſobriety, early knowledge of religion, and early habits of piety, are the moſt probable means of ſecuring the favour of God. To acquire theſe, is putting ourſelves in the way in which

which he himſelf has told us his bleſſing is to be found.

But religion is the only thing in which we ſeem to look for the end, without making uſe of the means: and yet it would not be more ſurpriſing if we were to expect that our children ſhould become artiſts and ſcholars, without being bred to arts and languages, than it is to look for a chriſtian world without a chriſtian education.

The nobleſt objects can yield no delight, if there be not in the mind a diſ-

a diſpoſition to enjoy them, ariſing from an intelligence of their nature, and a reverence for their value, which can only ſpring from long habit and early acquaintance. For to produce any capacity of enjoyment, there muſt be a congruity between the mind and the object. To the mathematician, demonſtration is pleaſure; to the philoſopher, the ſtudy of nature; to the voluptuous, the gratification of his appetite; to the poet, the pleaſures of the imagination. Theſe objects they all reſpectively purſue as their proper buſineſs, as pleaſures adapted to that

part

part of their nature which they have been accuſtomed to indulge and cultivate.

Now, as men will be apt to act conſiſtently with their general views and habitual tendencies, would it not be abſurd to expect that the philoſopher ſhould look for his ſovereign good at a ball, or the ſenſualiſt in the pleaſures of intellect or piety? None of theſe ends are anſwerable to the general views of the reſpective purſuer; they are not correſpondent to his ideas; they are not commenſurate to his aims. The ſub-

ſimeſt pleaſures can afford little gratification where a previous taſte has not been cultivated. A clown, who ſhould hear a ſcholar or an artiſt talk of the delights of a library, a picture gallery, or a concert, could not gueſs at the nature of the pleaſures they afford; nor would his being introduced to them give him much clearer ideas, becauſe he would bring to them an eye blind to proportion, an underſtanding new to ſcience, and an ear deaf to harmony.

Shall we expect then, ſince men can only be ſcholars by ſedulous labour, that

that they ſhall be chriſtians by mere chance? Shall we be ſurpriſed if thoſe do not fulfil the offices of religion, who are not trained to an acquaintance with them? And will it not be obvious that it muſt be ſome other thing beſides the abſtruſeneſs of creeds and opinions which makes chriſtianity unfaſhionable?

For it will not probably be diſputed, that in no age have the paſſions of youth been ſo early freed from the *muzzle of reſtraint*; in no age has the paternal authority been ſo contemptuouſly treated, or every

ſpecies

ſpecies of ſubordination ſo diſdainfully trampled on. All the ſhades of diſcrimination in ſociety ſeem to be melting into each other. In no age has imprudent fondneſs been ſo injuriouſly laviſh, or the ſupernumerary expences of the college and the ſchool (that prolific ſeed of corruption) been ſo prodigally augmented. In no age have the appetites been excited by ſuch early ſtimulants, and anticipated by ſuch premature indulgences. Never was the ſhining gloſs, the charming novelty of life ſo early worn off from all enjoyment by exceſſive uſe. Never had ſimple,

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and natural, and youthful pleaſures ſo early loſt their power over the mind; nor was ever one great ſecret of virtue and happineſs, the ſecret of being cheaply pleaſed, ſo little underſtood.

A taſte for coſtly, or artificial, or tumultuous pleaſures cannot be gratified, by their moſt ſedulous purſuers, at every moment; and what wretched management is it in the œconomy of human happineſs, ſo to contrive, as that the enjoyment ſhall be rare and difficult, and the intervals long and languid! Whereas

real

real and unadulterate pleasures occur perpetually to him who cultivates a taste for truth and nature, and science and virtue. But these simple and tranquil enjoyments cannot but be insipid to him, whose passions have been prematurely excited by agitating pleasures, or whose taste has been depraved by such as are debasing and frivolous; for it is of more consequence to virtue than some good people are willing to allow, to preserve the taste pure, and the judgment sound. A vitiated intellect has no small connection with depraved morals.

Since amuſements of ſome kind are neceſſary to all ages (I ſpeak now with an eye to mere human enjoyment), why ſhould it not be as proper to tether man as other animals? Why ſhould not he too be confined, in different ſtages of life, to certain reſtricted limitations? ſince nothing but experience ſeems to teach him, that, if he be allowed to anticipate his future poſſeſſions, and trample all the flowery fields of real as well as thoſe of imaginary and artificial enjoyment, he not only induces preſent diſguſt, but defaces and deſtroys all the rich materials of his future happineſs;

pineſs; and leaves himſelf, for the reſt of his life, nothing but ravaged fields and barren ſtubble.

But the great and radical defect, and that which comes more immediately within the preſent deſign, ſeems to be, that in general the characteriſtical principles of chriſtianity are not early and ſtrongly infuſed into the mind: that religion is rather taught incidentally, as a thing of ſubordinate value, than as the leading principle of human actions, and the great animating ſpring of human conduct. Were the high

influential principles of the chriſtian religion anxiouſly and early inculcated, we ſhould find that thoſe lapſes from virtue, to which paſſion and temptation afterwards too frequently ſolicit, would be more eaſily recoverable.

For though the evil propenſities of fallen nature, and the bewitching allurements of pleaſure, will too often ſeduce even thoſe of the beſt education into devious paths, yet we ſhall find that men will ſeldom be *incurably* wicked, without that internal corruption of principle, which knows

knows how to juſtify iniquity, and confirm evil conduct, by the ſanction of corrupt reaſoning.

The errors occaſioned by the violence of paſſion may be reformed, but ſyſtematic wickedneſs will be only fortified by time; and no decreaſe of ſtrength, no decay of appetite, can weaken the power of a pernicious principle. He who commits a wrong action indeed, puts himſelf out of the path of ſafety; but he who adopts a falſe principle, not only throws himſelf into the enemy's country, but burns the

ſhips, breaks the bridge, cuts off every retreat by which he might hope one day to return into his own.

Surely it will ſubject no one to the imputation of bigotry or enthuſiaſm if he venture to enquire whether the genuine doctrines of chriſtianity are made the ſtandard by which our young men of faſhion are commonly taught to try their principles, or to weigh their actions; or whether ſome more popular ſtandard, of cuſtom, or faſhion, or worldly opinion, be not too frequently allowed to ſuperſede them? Whether ſome idol of falſe honour

honour be not conſecrated for them to worſhip? Whether, even among the better ſort, reputation be not held out as a motive of ſufficient energy to produce virtue, in a world where yet the greateſt vices are every day practiſed openly, which do not at all obſtruct the reception of thoſe who practiſe them into the beſt company? Whether reſentment be not ennobled; and pride, and many other paſſions, erected into honourable virtues—virtues not leſs repugnant to the genius and ſpirit of chriſtianity, than obvious and groſs vices? Will it be thought impertinent to enquire

if the awful doctrines of a perpetually preſent Deity, and a future righteous judgment, are early impreſſed, and laſtingly engraven, on the hearts and conſciences of our high-born youth?

Perhaps, if there be any one particular in which we fall remarkably below the politer nations of antiquity, it is in that part of education which has a reference to purity of mind, and the diſcipline of the heart.

For the great ſecret of religious education, and which ſeems baniſhed from

from the preſent practice, conſiſts in training young men to an habitual interior reſtraint, an early government of the affections, and a courſe of ſelf-controul over thoſe tyrannizing inclinations, which have ſo natural a tendency to enſlave the human heart. Without this habit of moral reſtraint, which is one of the fundamental laws of chriſtian virtue, though men may, from natural temper, often *do* good, yet it is perhaps impoſſible that they ſhould ever *be* good. Without the vigorous exerciſe of this controuling principle, the beſt diſpoſitions, and the moſt amiable

ble qualities, will go but a little way towards eſtabliſhing a virtuous character. For the beſt diſpoſitions will be eaſily overcome by the concurrence of paſſion and temptation, in a heart where the paſſions have not been accuſtomed to this wholeſome diſcipline: and the moſt amiable qualities will but more eaſily betray their poſſeſſor, unleſs the yielding heart be fortified by repeated acts, and long habits, of reſiſtance.

In this, as in various other inſtances, we may bluſh at the ſuperiority

riority of Pagan inſtitution. Were the Roman youth taught to imagine themſelves always in the awful preſence of Cato, in order to habituate them betimes to ſuppreſs baſe ſentiments, and to excite ſuch as were generous and noble? And ſhould not the chriſtian youth be continually reminded, that a greater than Cato is here? Should they not be trained to the habit of acting under the conſtant impreſſion, that *He* to whom they muſt one day be accountable for intentions, as well as words and actions, is witneſs to the one as well as the other; that he not

not only is "about their path," but "understands their very thoughts?"

Were the disciples of a Pagan * leader taught that it was a motive sufficient to compel their obedience to any rule, whether they liked it or not, that it had the authority of their teacher's name? were the bare words, *the master hath said it*, sufficient to settle all disputes, and to subdue all reluctance? And shall the scholars of a more divine teacher, who have a code of laws written by

* Pythagoras.

God

God himſelf, be contented with a lower rule, or abide by a meaner authority? And is any argument drawn from human conſiderations likely to operate more forcibly on a dependant being, than that ſimple but grand aſſertion, with which ſo many of the precepts of our religion are introduced—Becauſe, THUS SAITH THE LORD?

For it is doing but little, in the infuſion of firſt principles, to obtain the bare aſſent of the underſtanding to the exiſtence of one Supreme Power, unleſs the heart and affections

go

go along with the conviction, by our conceiving of that power as intimately connected with ourſelves. A feeling temper will be but little affected with the cold idea of a *geometrical* God, as the excellent Paſcal expreſſes it, who merely adjuſts all the parts of matter, and keeps the elements in order. Such a mind will be but little moved, unleſs he be taught to conſider his Maker under the intereſting and endearing repreſentation which revealed religion gives of him. That "God is," will be to him rather an alarming than a conſolatory idea; till he be perſuaded of the ſubſequent

ſequent propoſition, that " he is the rewarder of all ſuch as diligently ſeek him." Nay, if natural religion does even acknowledge one awful attribute, that " God is juſt;" it will only increaſe the terror of a tender conſcience, till he learn, from the fountain of truth, that he is " the juſtifier of all who believe on him."

But if the great ſanctions of our religion are not deeply engraven on the heart, where ſhall we look for a more adequate curb to the fiery ſpirit of youth? For, let the elements be ever ſo kindly mixed in a human com-

compoſition, let the natural temper be ever ſo amiable, ſtill whenever a man ceaſes to think himſelf an accountable being, what motive can he have for reſiſting a ſtrong temptation to a preſent good, when he has no dread that he ſhall thereby forfeit a greater future good?

But it will be objected, that this deep ſenſe of religion would interfere with the general purpoſes of education, which is deſigned to qualify men for the buſineſs of human life, and not to train up a race of monks and aſcetics.

There

There is however ſo little real ſolidity in this ſpecious objection, that I am firmly perſuaded, that if religious principles were more deeply impreſſed on the heart, even the things of this world would be much better carried on. For where are we to look for ſo much punctuality, diligence, application, doing every thing in its proper day (the great hinge on which buſineſs turns), as among men of principle? Oeconomy of time, truth in obſerving his word, never daring to deceive or to diſappoint—theſe are the very eſſence of a man of buſineſs; and for theſe

to whom ſhall we moſt naturally look? Who is ſo little likely to be "ſlothful in buſineſs," as he who is "fervent in ſpirit?" Will not he be moſt regular in dealing with men, who is moſt diligent in "ſerving the Lord?"

But, it may be ſaid, allowing that religion does not neceſſarily ſpoil a man of *buſineſs*; yet it would effectually defeat thoſe accompliſhments, and counteract that fine breeding, which eſſentially conſtitute the *gentleman*.

This

This again is ſo far from being a natural conſequence, that, ſuppoſing all the other real advantages, of parts and education, to be equally taken into the account, there is no doubt but that, in point of true politeneſs, a real chriſtian would beat the world at its own weapons, the world itſelf being judge.

For though it muſt be confeſſed, that, in the preſent ſtate of things, other wickedneſs has made diſſimulation neceſſary; and that being the caſe, there is ſcarcely any one invention for which we are more obliged

to mankind than for that of politeneſs, as there is perhaps no ſcreen in the world which hides ſo many ugly ſights; yet while we allow that there never was ſo admirable a ſupplement to real goodneſs, as good breeding; it is however certain that the principles of chriſtianity put into action, would neceſſarily produce more genuine politeneſs than any maxims drawn from motives of human vanity or convenience. If *love*, *peace*, *joy*, *long ſuffering*, *gentleneſs*, *patience*, *goodneſs*, and *meekneſs* may be thought inſtruments to produce ſweetneſs of manners, theſe we are expreſsly told

are

are "the fruits of the ſpirit." If mourning with the afflicted, rejoicing with the happy; if "to eſteem others better than ourſelves;" if "to take the loweſt room;" if "not to ſeek our own;" if "not to behave ourſelves unſeemly;" if "not to ſpeak great ſwelling words of vanity"—if theſe are amiable, engaging, and polite parts of behaviour; then would the documents of Saint Paul make as true a fine gentleman as the *Courtier of Caſtiglione*, or even the *Letters of Lord Cheſterfield* himſelf. Then would ſimulation, and diſſimulation, and all the nice ſhades

and delicate gradations of paſſive and active deceit, be rendered ſuperfluous; and the affections of every heart be won by a ſhorter and a ſurer way, than by the elegant obliquities of this late popular preceptor; whoſe miſchiefs have outlived his reputation; and who, notwithſtanding the preſent juſt declenſion of his fame, has helped to relax the general nerve of virtue, and has left a taint upon the public morals, of which we are ſtill ſenſible.

That ſelf-abaſement then, which is inſeparable from chriſtianity, and the

the external ſigns of which good breeding knows ſo well how to aſſume; and thoſe charities which ſuggeſt invariable kindneſs to others, even in the ſmalleſt things, would, if left to their natural workings, produce that gentleneſs which it is one great object of a polite education to imitate. They would produce it too without effort and without exertion; for being inherent in the ſubſtance, it would naturally produce itſelf on the ſurface.

For however uſeful the inſtitutions of poliſhed ſociety may be found,

yet they can never alter the eternal difference between right and wrong; or convert appearances into realities; they cannot transform decency into virtue, nor make politeneſs paſs for principle. And the advocates for faſhionable breeding ſhould be humbled to reflect, that every convention of artificial manners was invented not to *cure*, but to *conceal*, deformity: that though the ſuperficial civilities of elegant life tend to make this corrupt world a more tolerable place than it would be without them; yet they never will be conſidered as a ſubſtitute for truth and virtue by

HIM

HIM who is to pass the definitive sentence on the characters of men.

Among the many prejudices which the young and the gay entertain against religion, one is, that it is the declared enemy to wit and genius. But, says one of its wittiest champions *, "Piety enjoins no man to be dull:" and it will be found, on a fair enquiry, that though it cannot be denied that irreligion has had able men for its advocates, yet they have never been the most able. Nor can any learned profession, any depart-

* Dr. South.

ment

ment in letters or in ſcience, produce a champion on the ſide of unbelief, but chriſtianity has a ſtill greater name to oppoſe to it; philoſophers themſelves being judges.

But while the young adopt an opinion from one claſs of writers, that religious men are weak; they acquire, from another, a notion that they are ridiculous: and this opinion, by mixing itſelf with their common notions, and deriving itſelf from their very amuſements, is the more miſchievous as it is received without reſiſtance or ſuſpicion.

One

One common medium through which they take this falſe view is, thoſe favourite works of wit and humour, ſo captivating to youthful imaginations, where no ſmall part of the author's ſucceſs perhaps has been owing to his dexterouſly introducing a pious character, with ſo many virtues that it is impoſſible not to love him, yet tinctured with ſo many abſurdities that it is impoſſible not to laugh at him. The reader's memory will furniſh him with too many inſtances of what is here meant. The ſlighteſt touches of a witty malice can make the beſt character ridiculous

lous. It is effected by any little aukwardneſs, abſence of mind, an obſolete phraſe, a formal pronunciation, a peculiarity of geſture. Or if ſuch a character be brought by unſuſpecting goodneſs, and truſting honeſty, into ſome fooliſh ſcrape, it will ſtamp an impreſſion of ridicule ſo indelible, that all his worth ſhall not be able to efface it: and the young, who do not always ſeparate their ideas very carefully, ſhall ever after, by this early and falſe aſſociation, conceive of piety as having ſomething eſſentially ridiculous in itſelf.

But

But one of the moſt infallible arts, by which the inexperienced are engaged on the ſide of irreligion, is that popular air of candour, good-nature, and toleration, which it ſo invariably puts on. While, on the one hand, ſincere piety is often accuſed of moroſeneſs and ſeverity, becauſe it cannot hear the doctrines, on which it founds its eternal hopes, derided without emotion; indifference or unbelief, on the other hand, purchaſe the praiſe of candour at an eaſy price, becauſe they neither ſuffer grief, nor expreſs indignation, at hearing the moſt awful truths ridiculed,

diculed, or the moſt ſolemn obligations ſet at nought.

The ſcoffers whom young people hear talk, and the books they hear quoted, falſely charge their own injurious opinions on chriſtianity, and then unjuſtly accuſe her of being the monſter they have made. They dreſs her up with the ſword of perſecution in one hand, and the flames of intolerance in the other; and then ridicule the ſober-minded for worſhipping an idol which their miſrepreſentation has rendered as malignant as Moloch. In the mean time

time they affect to ſeize on benevolence with excluſive appropriation as their own cardinal virtue, and to accuſe of a bigotted cruelty that narrow ſpirit which points out the perils of licentiouſneſs, and the terrors of a future account. And yet this benevolence, with all its tender mercies, is not afraid nor aſhamed to endeavour at ſnatching away from humble piety the comfort of a preſent hope, and the bright proſpect of a felicity that ſhall have no end. It does not however ſeem a very probable means of adding to the ſtock of human happineſs, by plundering

mankind of that principle, by the deſtruction of which friendſhip is robbed of its bond, ſociety of its ſecurity, patience of its motive, morality of its foundation, integrity of its reward, ſorrow of its conſolation, life of its balm, and death of its ſupport.

It will not perhaps be one of the meaneſt advantages of a better ſtate, that, as the will ſhall be reformed, ſo the judgment ſhall be rectified; that "evil ſhall no more be called good," nor the "churl liberal;" nor the plunderer of our beſt poſſeſſion, our prin-

principles, benevolent. Then it will be evident that greater violence could not be done to truth and language than to wreſt benevolence from chriſtianity, her moſt appropriate and peculiar attribute. If benevolence be "good-will to men," it was that which angelic meſſengers were not thought too high to announce, nor a much higher being than angels too great to teach by his precepts, and to illuſtrate by his death: it was the criterion, the very watch-word as it were, by which he intended his religion and his followers ſhould be diſtinguiſhed. "By

this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another." Beſides, it is the very genius of chriſtianity to extirpate all ſelfiſhneſs, on whoſe vacated ground benevolence naturally and neceſſarily plants itſelf.

But not to run through all the particulars which obſtruct the growth of piety in young perſons, I ſhall only name one more. They hear much declamation from the faſhionable reaſoners againſt the contracted and ſelfiſh ſpirit of chriſtianity—that it

it is of a ſordid temper, works for pay, and looks for reward.

But this jargon of French philoſophy, which prates of pure diſintereſted goodneſs acting for its own ſake, and equally deſpiſing puniſhment and diſdaining recompence, indicates as little knowledge of human nature as of chriſtian revelation, when it addreſſes man as a being made up of pure intellect, without any mixture of paſſions, and who can be made happy without hope, and virtuous without fear.

A creature hurried away by the impulſe of ſome impetuous inclination, is not likely to be reſtrained (if he be reſtrained at all) by a cold reflection on the beauty of virtue. If the dread of offending God, and incurring his everlaſting diſpleaſure, cannot ſtop him, how ſhall a weaker motive do it? When we ſee that the powerful ſanctions which religion holds out are too often an ineffectual curb: to think of attaining the ſame end by feebler means, is as if one ſhould expect to make a watch go the better by breaking the main ſpring; nay, as abſurd as if the philo-

philoſopher who inculcates the doctrine, ſhould undertake with one of his fingers to lift an immenſe weight, which had reſiſted the powers of the crane and the lever.

On calm and temperate ſpirits indeed, in the hour of retirement, in the repoſe of the paſſions, in the abſence of temptation, virtue does ſeem to be her own adequate reward; and very lovely are the fruits ſhe bears, in preſerving health, credit, and fortune. But on how few will this principle act! and even on them how often will its operation be ſuſ-

pended! And though virtue for her own ſake might have captivated a few hearts, which almoſt ſeem caſt in a natural mould of goodneſs; yet no motive could, at all times, be ſo likely to reſtrain even theſe, under the preſſure of temptation, as this ſimple aſſertion—*For all this, God will bring me into judgment.*

But it is the beauty of our religion, that it is not held out excluſively to a few ſelect ſpirits; that it is not an object of ſpeculation, or an exerciſe of ingenuity, but a *rule of life*, ſuited to every condition, capacity, and

and temper. It is the glory of the chriſtian religion to *be*, what it was the glory of every pagan inſtitution *not* to be, the *religion of the people*; and that which conſtitutes its characteriſtic value, is its ſuitableneſs to the genius, condition, and neceſſities of all mankind.

For with whatever obſcurities it has pleaſed God to ſhadow ſome parts of his written word, yet he has graciouſly ordered that whatever is neceſſary ſhould be perſpicuous alſo: and though "clouds and darkneſs are the habitation of his throne,"

yet they are not the medium through which he has left us to diſcover our duty. In this, as in all other points, it has a decided ſuperiority over all the ancient ſyſtems of philoſophy, which were always in many reſpects impracticable and extravagant, becauſe not framed from obſervations drawn from a perfect knowledge "of what was in man." Whereas the whole ſcheme of the Goſpel is accommodated to real human nature; laying open its mortal diſeaſe, preſenting its only remedy; exhibiting rules of conduct, often difficult indeed, but never impoſſible; and where the rule

rule was ſo high that the practicability ſeemed deſperate, holding out a living pattern, to elucidate the doctrine and to illuſtrate the precept: offering every where the cleareſt notions of what we have to hope, and what we have to fear; the ſtrongeſt injunctions of what we are to believe; and the moſt explicit directions of what we are to do.

In ſhort, whoever examines the wants of his own heart, and the appropriated aſſiſtance which the Goſpel furniſhes, will find them to be two tallies which exactly correſpond—

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an internal evidence, ſtronger perhaps than any other, of the truth of revelation.

This is the religion with which the ingenuous hearts of youth ſhould be warmed, and by which their ſpirits, while pliant, ſhould be directed. This will afford a "lamp to their paths," ſtronger, ſteadier, brighter than the feeble and uncertain glimmer of a cold and comfortleſs philoſophy.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Other ſymptoms of the decline of chriſtianity—No family religion—Corrupt or negligent example of ſuperiors—The ſelf-denying and evangelical virtues held in contempt—Neglect of encouraging and promoting religion among ſervants.

IT was by no means the deſign of the preſent undertaking to make a general invective on the corrupt ſtate of manners, or even to animadvert on the conduct of the higher ranks, but inaſmuch as the corruption

ruption of that conduct, and the depravation of those manners, appear to be a natural consequence of the visible decline of religion.

Of the other obvious causes which contribute to this decline of morals little will be said. Nor is the present a romantic attempt to restore the simplicity of primitive manners. This is too literally an age of gold, to expect that it should be so in the poetical and figurative sense. It would be unjust and absurd not to form our opinions and expectations from the present general state of society. And it would argue great igno-

ignorance of the corruption which commerce, and conqueſt, and riches, and arts neceſſarily introduce into a ſtate, to look for the ſame ſober-mindedneſs, ſimplicity, and purity among the *dregs of Romulus*, as the ſevere and ſimple manners of elder Rome preſented.

But though it would be an attempt of deſperate hardihood, to controvert that maxim of the witty bard, that

To mend the world's a vaſt deſign;

yet to make the beſt of the times in which we live; to fill up the meaſure

meaſure of our own actual, particular, and individual duties; and to take care that the age ſhall not be the worſe for our having been caſt into it, ſeems to be the bare dictate of common probity, and not a romantic flight of impracticable perfection.

But is it then ſo very chimerical to imagine that the benevolent can be ſober-minded? Is it romantic to deſire that the good ſhould be conſiſtent? Is it abſurd to fancy that what has once been practiſed ſhould not now be impracticable?

It is impoſſible then not to help regretting that it ſhould be the general temper of many of the leading perſons of that age which arrogates to itſelf the glorious character of the *age of benevolence*, to be kind, and conſiderate, and compaſſionate, every where rather than at home: that the rich and the faſhionable ſhould be zealous in promoting religious as well as charitable inſtitutions abroad, and yet diſcourage every thing which looks like religion in their own families: that they ſhould be at a conſiderable expence in inſtructing the poor at a diſtance, and yet diſcredit

piety

piety among their own ſervants—thoſe more immediate objects of every man's attention whom Providence has enabled to keep any; and for whoſe conduct he will be finally accountable, inaſmuch as he has helped to corrupt it.

Is there any degree of pecuniary bounty without doors which can counteract the miſchief of a wrong example at home; or atone for that infectious laxity of principle, which ſpreads corruption wherever its influence extends? Is not he the beſt benefactor to ſociety who ſets the

the beſt example, and who does, not only the moſt good, but the leaſt evil? Will not that man, however liberal, very imperfectly promote virtue in the world at large, who neglects to diſſeminate the principles of it within the immediate ſphere of his own perſonal influence, by a ſober conduct and a blameleſs behaviour? Can a generous but profligate perſon atone by his purſe for the diſorders of his life? or expect a bleſſing on his bounties, while he defeats their effect by a profane converſation?

In moral as well as political treatiſes, it is often aſſerted that it is a great evil to do no good: but it has not been perhaps enough inſiſted on, that it is a great good to do no evil. This ſpecies of goodneſs is not oſtentatious enough for popular declamation; and the value of this abſtinence from vice is perhaps not well underſtood but by chriſtians, becauſe it wants the oſtenſible brilliancy of actual performance.

But as the *principles* of chriſtianity are in no great repute, ſo their concomitant *qualities*, the evangelical virtues,

virtues, are proportionably diſeſteemed. But thoſe ſecret habits of ſelf-controul, thoſe interior and unobtruſive virtues, which excite no aſtoniſhment, kindle no emulation, and extort no praiſe, are yet the moſt difficult, and the moſt ſublime; and, if chriſtianity be true, will be the moſt graciouſly accepted by *him* who witneſſes the ſecret ſtruggle and the ſilent victory: while the ſplendid deeds which have the world for their witneſs, and immortal fame for their reward, ſhall perhaps coſt him who achieved them leſs than it coſts a conſcientious chriſtian to ſubdue

one irregular inclination; a conqueſt which the world will never know, and, if it did, would probably deſpiſe.

For though great actions performed on human motives are permitted, by the great Diſpoſer, to be equally beneficial to ſociety with ſuch as are performed on purer principles; yet it is an affecting conſideration, that, at the final adjuſtment of accounts, the politician who *raiſed* a ſtate, or the hero who *preſerved* it, may miſs of that favour of God, which, if it was not his motive, will pro-

probably not be his reward. And it is awful to reflect, as we viſit the monuments juſtly raiſed by public gratitude, or the ſtatues properly erected by well-earned admiration, on what may now be the unalterable condition of the illuſtrious object of theſe deſerved honours; and that he who has ſaved a ſtate may have loſt his own ſoul.

A chriſtian life ſeems to conſiſt of two things, almoſt equally difficult; the adoption of good habits, and the exciſion of ſuch as are evil. No one

ſets out on a religious courſe with a ſtock of native innocence, or actual freedom from ſin; for there is no ſuch ſtate in human life. The natural heart is not a blank paper, whereon the divine ſpirit has nothing to do but to ſtamp characters of goodneſs: but many blots and defilements are to be eraſed, as well as freſh impreſſions to be made.

The vigilant chriſtian therefore, who acts with an eye to the approbation of his Maker, rather than to that of mankind; to a future account, rather than to preſent glory; will

will find that, diligently to cultivate the "unweeded garden" of his own heart; to mend the ſoil; to clear the ground of its indigenous vices, by practiſing the painful buſineſs of extirpation; will be that part of his duty which will coſt him moſt labour, and bring him leaſt credit: while the fair flower of one ſhowy action, produced with little trouble, and of which the pleaſure is reward enough, ſhall gain him more praiſe than the eradication of the rankeſt weeds which over-run the natural heart.

But the Goſpel judges not after

the manner of men; for it never fails to make the abſtinent virtues a previous ſtep to the right performance of the operative ones; and the relinquiſhing what is wrong to be a neceſſary prelude to the performance of what is right. It makes "ceaſing to do evil" the indiſpenſable preliminary to "learning to do well." It continually ſuggeſts that ſomething is to be laid aſide as well as to be practiſed. We muſt "hate vain thoughts" before we can "love God's law." We muſt lay aſide "malice and hypocriſy," to *enable* us "to receive the engrafted word."

—Having

—Having "a conſcience void of offence;" "abſtaining from fleſhly luſts;" "bringing every thought into obedience"—theſe are actions, or rather negations, which, though they never will obtain immortality from the chiſel of the ſtatuary, the declamation of the hiſtorian, or the panegyric of the poet, ſerve however to conſtitute the true chriſtian temper, to promote heavenly mindedneſs, and to procure the divine favour.

And, for our encouragement, it is obſervable that a more difficult chriſtian

tian virtue generally involves an eaſier one. A habit of ſelf-denial in permitted pleaſures eaſily induces a victory over ſuch as are unlawful. And to ſit looſe to our own poſſeſſions, neceſſarily includes an exemption from coveting thoſe of others; and ſo on of the reſt.

Will it be difficult then to trace back to that want of early reſtraint noticed in the preceding chapter, that licence of behaviour which, having been indulged in youth, afterwards reigns uncontrouled in families; and having infected education

cation in its firſt ſprings, taints all the ſtreams of domeſtic virtue? Nor is it ſtrange that that ſame want of religious principle which corrupted our children, ſhould corrupt our ſervants.

We ſcarcely go into any company without hearing ſome invective againſt the increaſed profligacy of this order of men; and the remark is made with as great an air of aſtoniſhment, as if the cauſe of the complaint were not as viſible as the truth of it. It would be endleſs to point out inſtances in which the increaſed

creaſed diſſipation of their betters (as they are oddly called) has contributed to the growth of this evil. But it comes only within the immediate deſign of the preſent undertaking, to inſiſt on the ſingle circumſtance of the almoſt total extermination of religion in faſhionable families, as a cauſe adequate, of itſelf, to any conſequence which depraved morals can produce.

Is there not a degree of injuſtice in perſons who diſcover ſtrong indignation at thoſe crimes which crowd our priſons, and furniſh our

our inceſſant executions, and yet diſcourage not an internal principle of vice; ſince thoſe crimes are nothing more than that principle put into action? And it is no leſs abſurd than cruel, in ſuch of the great as lead diſorderly lives, to expect to prevent vice by the laws they make to reſtrain or puniſh it, while their own example is a perpetual ſource of temptation to commit it. If by their own practice they demonſtrate that they think a vicious life is the only happy one, with what colour of juſtice can they inflict penalties on others, who, by acting on the ſame

principle, expect the ſame indulgence?

And indeed it is ſomewhat unreaſonable to expect very high degrees of virtue and probity from a claſs of people whoſe whole life, after they are admitted into diſſipated families, is one continued counteraction of the principles in which they have probably been bred.

When a poor youth is tranſplanted from one of thoſe excellent inſtitutions which do honour to the preſent age, and give ſome hope of reform-

ing the next, into the family, perhaps, of his noble benefactor, who has provided liberally for his inſtruction; what muſt be his aſtoniſhment at finding the manner of life to which he is introduced diametrically oppoſite to that life, to which he has been taught that ſalvation is alone annexed! He has been trained in a wholeſome terror of gaming: but now his intereſts and paſſions are forcibly engaged on the ſide of play, ſince the very profits of his place are made *ſyſtematically* to depend on the card-table. He has been taught that it was his bounden duty to be devoutly

thank-

thankful for his own ſcanty meal, perhaps of barley bread; yet he ſees his noble lord ſit down every day,

Not to a dinner, but a hecatomb;

to a repaſt for which every element is plundered, and every climate impoveriſhed; for which nature is ranſacked, and art is exhauſted; without even the formal ceremony of a ſlight acknowledgment. It will be lucky for the maſter, if his ſervant does not happen to know that even the pagans never ſat down to a repaſt without making a libation to their deities; and that the Jews did not eat a little fruit, or drink a

cup

cup of water, without an expreſſion of devout thankfulneſs.

Next to the law of God, he has been taught to reverence the law of the land; and to reſpect an act of parliament next to a text of Scripture: yet he ſees his honourable protector, publicly in his own houſe, engaged in the evening in playing at a game expreſsly prohibited by the laws, and againſt which perhaps he himſelf had aſſiſted in the day to paſs an act.

While the contempt of religion

was confined to wits and philoſophers, the effect was not ſo ſenſibly felt. But we cannot congratulate the ordinary race of mortals on their emancipation from old prejudices, or their indifference to ſacred uſages; as it is not at all viſible that the world is become happier in proportion as it is become more enlightened. We might rejoice more in the boaſted diffuſion of light and freedom, were it not apparent that bankruptcies are grown more frequent, robberies more common, divorces more numerous, and forgeries more extenſive—that more rich men die by their own hand,

hand, and more poor men by the hand of the executioner—than when chriſtianity was practiſed by the vulgar, and countenanced, at leaſt, by the great.

Is it not to be regretted therefore, while the affluent are encouraging ſo many admirable ſchemes for promoting religion among the children of the poor, that they do not like to *perpetuate* the principle, by encouraging it in their ſervants alſo? Is it not pity, ſince theſe are ſo moderately furniſhed with the good things of this life, to rob them of that bright

reverſion, the bare hope of which is a counterpoiſe to all the hardſhips they undergo here—eſpecially ſince, by diminiſhing this future hope, we ſhall not be likely to add to their preſent uſefulneſs?

Still allowing, what has been already granted, that abſolute infidelity is not the reigning evil, and that ſervants will perhaps be more likely to ſee religion neglected than to hear it ridiculed; would it not be a meritorious kindneſs, in families of a better ſtamp, to furniſh them with more opportunities of learning

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and practiſing their duty? Is it not impolitic indeed, as well as unkind, to refuſe them any means of having impreſſed on their conſciences the operative principles of chriſtianity? It is but little, barely not to *oppoſe* their going to church, or doing their duty at home, unleſs their opportunities of doing both are facilitated, by giving them, at certain ſeaſons, as few employments as poſſible that may interfere with both. Even when religion is by pretty general conſent baniſhed from our families, that only furniſhes a ſtronger reaſon why our families ſhould not

be baniſhed from religion in the churches.

But if theſe opportunities are not made eaſy and convenient to them, their ſuperiors have no right to expect from them a zeal ſo far tranſcending their own, as to induce them to ſurmount difficulties for the ſake of their duty. Religion is never once repreſented in ſcripture as a light attainment; it is never once illuſtrated by an eaſy, a quiet, or an indolent allegory. On the contrary, it is exhibited under the active figure of a combat, a race; ſomething expreſſive

preſſive of exertion, activity, progreſs. And yet many are unjuſt enough to think that this warfare can be fought, though they are perpetually weakening the vigour of the combatant; this race be run, though they are inceſſantly obſtructing the progreſs of him who runs by ſome hard and interfering command. That that compaſſionate judge who cannot but be particularly touched with the feeling of *their* infirmities, will tenderly allow for their trials, and be merciful to their failings, can never be doubted; but what portion of that forgiveneſs he

will extend to thoſe who lay on their virtue hard burdens "too heavy for them to bear," who ſhall ſay?

To keep any immortal being in a ſtate of ſpiritual darkneſs, is a poſitive diſobedience to *His* law, who when he beſtowed the Bible, no leſs than when he created the material world, ſaid, *Let there be light.* It were well for both the advantage of maſter and ſervant, that the latter ſhould have the doctrines of the Goſpel frequently impreſſed on his heart, that his conſcience ſhould be made familiar with a ſyſtem which offers ſuch

ſuch clear and intelligible propoſitions of moral duty. The ſtriking interrogation, "how ſhall I do this great wickedneſs, and ſin againſt God?" will perhaps operate as forcibly on an uncultivated mind, as the moſt eloquent eſſay, to prove that man is not an accountable being. That once credited promiſe, that "they who have done well ſhall go into everlaſting life," will be more grateful to the ſpirit of a plain man, than that more elegant and diſintereſted aphoriſm, that *virtue is its own reward.* That "he that walketh uprightly walketh ſurely," is not on the

the whole a dangerous or a miſleading maxim. And "well done, good and faithful ſervant! I will make thee ruler over many things," though offenſive to the liberal ſpirit of philoſophic dignity, is a comfortable ſupport to humble and ſuffering piety. That "we ſhould do to others as we would they ſhould do to us," is a portable and compendious meaſure of ſocial duty, always at hand, as always referring to ſomething within himſelf, not amiſs for a poor man to carry conſtantly about with him, who has neither time nor learning to ſearch for a better. All

Seneca's arguments againſt the fear of death never yet reconciled one reader to its approach, half ſo effectually as the humble believer is reconciled to it by that ſimple perſuaſion, " I know that my Redeemer liveth."

While the modern philoſopher is extending the boundaries of human knowledge, by undertaking to prove that matter is eternal; or enlarging the ſtock of human happineſs, by demonſtrating the extinction of ſpirit: it can do no harm to an unlettered man to believe, that " heaven and

and earth ſhall paſs away, but God's word ſhall not paſs away." While the former is indulging the profitable enquiry why the Deity made the world ſo late, or why he made it at all, it will not hurt the latter to believe that " in the beginning God made the world," and that in the end " he ſhall judge it in righteouſneſs." While the one is criticiſing the creed, he will be no loſer by encouraging the other to keep the commandments.

For it is a very valuable part of chriſtianity, that though it is an entire

tire and perfect ſyſtem in its deſign; though it exhibits one great plan, from which complete trains of argument, and connected ſchemes of reaſoning, may be deduced; yet in compaſſion to the multitude, for whom this benevolent inſtitution was in a good meaſure deſigned, and who could not have comprehended a long chain of propoſitions, or have embraced remote deductions, the moſt important truths of doctrine, and the moſt eſſential documents of virtue, are detailed in ſingle maxims, and compriſed in ſhort ſentences; independent of themſelves, yet making

ing a neceſſary part of a conſummate whole; from a few of which elementary principles the whole train of human virtues has been deduced, and many a perfect body of ethics has been framed.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

The negligent conduct of chriſtians no real objection againſt chriſtianity.—The reaſon why its effects are not more manifeſt to worldly men, is, becauſe believers do not lead chriſtian lives.—Profeſſors differ but little in their practice from unbelievers.—Even real chriſtians are too diffident and timid, and afraid of acting up to their principles.—The abſurdity of the charge commonly brought againſt ſerious people, that they are too ſtrict.

IT is an objection frequently brought againſt chriſtianity, that if it exhibited ſo perfect a ſcheme, if

if its influences were as ſtrong, if its effects were as powerful, as its friends pretend, it muſt have produced more viſible conſequences in the reformation of mankind. This is not the place fully to anſwer this objection, which (like all the other cavils againſt our religion) continues to be urged juſt as if it never *had* been anſwered.

That vice and immorality prevail in no ſmall degree in countries profeſſing chriſtianity, we need not go out of our own to be convinced. But that this is the caſe only becauſe this

this benign principle is not suffered to operate in its full power, will be no less obvious to all who are sincere in their enquiries. For if we allow (and who that examines impartially can help allowing?) that it is the natural tendency of christianity to make men better, then it must be the aversion to receiving it, and not the fault of the principle, which prevents them from becoming so.

Those who are acquainted with the effects it actually produced in the first ages of the church, when it *was* received in its genuine purity,

and when it *did* operate without obſtruction, from its *followers* at leaſt, will want no other proof of its inherent power and efficacy. At that period, its moſt decided and induſtrious enemy, the emperor Julian, could recommend the *manners* of the Galileans to the imitation of his pagan high prieſt; though he himſelf, at the ſame time, was doing every thing which the moſt inveterate malice, ſharpened by the acuteſt wit, and backed by the moſt abſolute power, could deviſe, to diſcredit their doctrines.

Nor

Nor would the efficacy of chriſtianity be leſs viſible now, in influencing the conduct of its profeſſors, if its principles were heartily and ſincerely received. They would operate on the conduct ſo effectually, that we ſhould ſee morals and manners growing out of principles, as ſpontaneouſly and neceſſarily as we ſee other conſequences grow out of their proper and natural cauſes. Let but this great ſpring have its unobſtructed play, and there would be little occaſion to declaim againſt this exceſs or that enormity. If the ſame ſkill and care which are em-

ployed in curing ſymptoms, were vigorouſly levelled at the internal principle of the diſeaſe, the moral health would feel the benefit. If that attention which is beſtowed in lopping the redundant and unſightly branches were devoted to the cultivation of a ſound and uncorrupt root, the effect of this labour would ſoon be diſcovered by the excellence of the fruits.

For though, even in the higheſt poſſible exertion of religious principle, and the moſt diligent practice of all its conſequential train of virtues,

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man would ſtill find evil propenſities enough, in his fallen nature, to make it neceſſary that he ſhould counteract them, by keeping alive his diligence after higher attainments, and to quicken his aſpirations after a better ſtate; yet the prevailing temper would be in general right, the will would be in a great meaſure rectified; and the heart, feeling and acknowledging its diſeaſe, would apply itſelf diligently to the only remedy. For though even the beſt men have infirmities enough to deplore, commit ſins enough to keep them deeply humble, and feel more

ſenſibly than others the imperfections of that veſſel in which their heavenly treaſure is hid: theſe however have the internal conſolation of knowing that they ſhall have to reckon with one who "knoweth whereof they are made;" who will accept of faith and repentance inſtead of ſinleſs perfection, and of humble ſincerity in lieu of entire holineſs.

All the heavy charges which have been brought againſt religion, have been taken from the abuſes of it. In every other inſtance the injuſtice

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of this proceeding would be notorious: but there is a general want of candour in the judgment of men on this ſubject, which we do not find them exerciſe on other occaſions; that of throwing the fault of the erring or ignorant profeſſor on the profeſſion itſelf.

It does not derogate from the honourable profeſſion of arms, that there are cowards and braggarts. If any man loſe his eſtate by the chicanery of an attorney, or his health by the blunder of a phyſician, it is commonly ſaid that the one was a

diſgrace to his buſineſs, and the other was ignorant of it; but no one therefore concludes that law and phyſic are contemptible profeſſions.

Chriſtianity alone is obliged to bear all the obloquy incurred by the miſconduct of its followers; to ſuſtain all the reproach excited by ignorant, by fanatical, by ſuperſtitious, or hypocritical profeſſors. But whoever accuſes it of a tendency to produce the errors of theſe profeſſors, muſt have picked up his opinion any where rather than in the New Teſtament, which being the only

only authentic hiſtory of chriſtianity, is that which candour would naturally conſult for information.

But as worldly and irreligious men do not draw their notions from that pure fountain, but from the polluted ſtream of human practice; as they form their judgment of divine truth from the conduct of thoſe who pretend to be enlightened by it; ſome charitable allowance *muſt* be made for the contempt which they entertain for chriſtianity, when they ſee what poor effects it produces in the lives of the gene-

rality of profeſſing chriſtians. What do they obſerve there which can lead them to entertain very high ideas of the principles which give birth to ſuch practices?

Do men of the world diſcover any marked, any decided difference between the conduct of nominal chriſtians, and that of the reſt of their neighbours who pretend to no religion at all? Do they ſee, in the daily lives of ſuch, any great abundance of thoſe fruits by which they have heard believers are to be known? On the contrary, do they not diſcern

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in them the ſame anxious and unwearied purſuit after the things of earth, as in thoſe who do not profeſs to have any thought of heaven? Do not they ſee them labour as ſeduloufly in the intereſts of a debaſing and frivolous diſſipation, as thoſe who do not pretend to have any nobler object in view? Is there not the ſame eargerneſs to plunge into all ſorts of follies themſelves, and the ſame unrighteous ſpeed in introducing their children to them, as if they had never entered into a ſolemn engagement to renounce them? Is there not the ſame ſelf-indulgence,

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the ſame luxury, and the ſame paſſionate attachment to the things of this world in them, as is viſible in thoſe who do not look for another?

Do not thoughtleſs neglect, and habitual diſſipation, anſwer, as to ſociety, all the ends of the moſt decided infidelity? Between the barely decent and the openly profane there is indeed this difference; that the one, by making no profeſſion, deceives neither the world nor his own heart; while the other, by intrenching himſelf in forms, fancies that he does ſomething, and thanks God that "he

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is not like this publican." The one only ſhuts his eyes upon the danger which the other deſpiſes.

But theſe unfruitful profeſſors would do well to recollect, that, by a conduct ſo little worthy of their high calling, they not only violate the law to which they have vowed obedience, but occaſion many to diſbelieve or to deſpiſe it; that they are thus in a great meaſure accountable for the infidelity of others, and of courſe will have to anſwer for more than their own perſonal offences. For did they in any reſpect

live

live up to the principles they profeſs; did they adorn the doctrines of chriſtianity by a life in any degree conſonant to their faith; did they exhibit any thing of the "beauty of holineſs" in their daily converſation; they would then give ſuch a demonſtrative proof, not only of the ſincerity of their own obedience, but of the brightneſs of that divine light by which they profeſs to walk, that the moſt determined unbeliever would at laſt begin to think there muſt be *ſomething* in a religion of which the effects were ſo viſible, and the fruits ſo amiable; and might in time be led

led to "glorify," not *them*, not the imperfect doers of these works, but "their Father which is in heaven." Whereas, as things are at present carried on, the obvious conclusion must be, either that christians do not believe in the religion they profess, or that there is no truth in the religion itself.

For will he not naturally say, that, if its influences were so predominant, its consequences must be more evident? that, if the prize held out were really so bright, those who truly believed so would surely *do* something,

thing, and *sacrifice* something, to obtain it?

This effect of the careless conduct of believers on the hearts of others, will probably be a heavy aggravation of their own guilt at the final reckoning: and there is no negligent christian can guess where the infection of his example may stop; or how remotely it may be pleaded as a palliation of the sins of others, who either may think themselves safe while they are only doing what *christians* allow themselves to do; or who may adduce a christian's habitual

violation

violation of the divine law, as a preſumptive evidence that there is no truth in chriſtianity.

This ſwells the amount of the actual miſchief beyond calculation. And there is ſomething terrible in the idea of this ſort of indefinite evil, that the careleſs chriſtian can never know the extent of the contagion he ſpreads, nor the multiplied infection which *they* may communicate in *their* turn, whom *his* diſorders firſt corrupted.

And there is this farther aggrava-

tion of his offence, that he will not only be anſwerable for all the poſitive evil of which his example is the cauſe; but for the omiſſion of all the probable good which might have been called forth in others, had *his* actions been conſiſtent with his profeſſion. What a ſtrong, what an almoſt irreſiſtible conviction would it carry to the hearts of unbelievers, if they beheld that characteriſtic difference in the manners of chriſtians, which their profeſſion gives one a right to expect! if they ſaw that diſintereſtedneſs, that humility, ſober-mindedneſs, temperance, ſimplicity,

ſimplicity, and ſincerity, which are the unavoidable fruits of a genuine faith!

But, while a man talks like a ſaint, and yet lives like a ſinner; while he profeſſes to believe like an apoſtle, and yet leads the life of a ſenſualiſt; talks of an ardent faith, and yet exhibits a cold and low practice; boaſts himſelf the diſciple of a meek maſter, and yet is as much a ſlave to his paſſions as they who acknowledge no ſuch authority; while he appears the proud profeſſor of an humble religion, or the intemperate champion

of a ſelf-denying one: ſuch a man brings chriſtianity into diſrepute; confirms thoſe in error who might have been awakened to conviction; ſtrengthens doubt into diſbelief, and hardens indifference into contempt.

Even among thoſe of a better caſt, and a purer principle, the exceſſive reſtraints of timidity, caution, and that "fear of man, which bringeth a ſnare;" confine, and almoſt ſtifle the generous ſpirit of an ardent exertion in the cauſe of religion. Chriſtianity may pathetically expoſtulate, that it is not always "an open enemy which

which diſhonours her," but her "familiar friend." And, "what doſt thou more than others?" is a queſtion which even the good and worthy ſhould often aſk themſelves, in order to quicken their zeal; to prevent the total ſtagnation of unexerted principles, on the one hand; or the danger, on the other, of their being driven down the gulf of ruin, by the unreſiſted and confluent tides of temptation, faſhion, and example.

In a very ſtrict and mortified age, of which a ſcrupulous ſeverity was the predominant character, precau-

tions againſt an exceſſive zeal might, and doubtleſs would, be a wholeſome and prudent meaſure. But in theſe times of relaxed principle and frigid indifference, to ſee people ſo vigilantly on their guard againſt the imaginary miſchiefs of enthuſiaſm, while they run headlong into the real oppoſite perils of a deſtructive licentiouſneſs, puts one in mind of the one-eyed animal in the fable; who, living on the banks of the ocean, never fancied he could be deſtroyed any way but by drowning: but, while he kept that one eye conſtantly fixed on the ſea, on which

ſide

ſide he concluded all the peril lay, he was devoured by an enemy on the dry land, from which quarter he never ſuſpected any danger.

Are not the miſchiefs of an enthuſiaſtic piety inſiſted on with as much earneſtneſs as if an extravagant devotion were the prevailing propenſity? Is not the neceſſity of moderation as vehemently urged as if an intemperate zeal were the epidemic diſtemper of the great world? as if all our apparent danger and natural bias lay on the ſide of a too rigid auſterity, which required the diſcreet and conſtant counteraction of an

oppoſite principle? Would not a ſtranger be almoſt tempted to imagine, from the frequent invectives againſt extreme ſtrictneſs, that abſtraction from the world, and a monaſtic rage for retreat, were the ruling temper; that we were in ſome danger of ſeeing our places of diverſion abandoned; and the enthuſiaſtic ſcenes of the *Holy Fathers of the deſert* acted over again by the frantic and uncontroulable devotion of our young perſons of faſhion?

It is ſeriouſly to be regretted, in an age like the preſent, remarkable for indifference in religion and levity in

in manners, and which ſtands ſo much in need of lively patterns of firm and reſolute piety, that many who really are chriſtians on the ſobereſt conviction, ſhould not appear more openly and decidedly on the ſide they have eſpouſed; that they aſſimilate ſo very much with the manners of thoſe about them (which manners they yet ſcruple not to diſapprove); and, inſtead of an avowed but prudent ſteadfaſtneſs, which might draw over the others, appear evidently fearful of being thought preciſe and over-ſcrupulous; and actually ſeem to diſavow their right principles, by conceſſions and accom-

commodations not ſtrictly conſiſtent with them. They often ſeem cautiouſly afraid of *doing too much*, and *going too far*; and the dangerous plea, the neceſſity of *living like other people*, of *being like the reſt of the world*, and the propriety of *not being particular*, is brought as a reaſonable apology for a too yielding and indiſcriminate conformity.

But, at a time when almoſt all are ſinking into the prevailing corruption, how beautiful a rare, a ſingle integrity is, let the inſtances of Lot and Noah declare. And to thoſe with whom a poem is an higher authority

authority than the Bible, let me recommend the moſt animated picture of a righteous ſingularity that ever was delineated, in

> ——The Seraph Abdiel, faithful found
> Among the faithleſs, faithful only he;
> Among innumerable falſe, unmov'd,
> Unſhaken, unſeduc'd, unterrified,
> His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal:
> Nor NUMBERS, nor EXAMPLE with him wrought
> To ſwerve from truth, or change his conſtant mind,
> Tho' SINGLE.
>
> PAR. LOST, b. iv.

Few indeed of the more orderly and decent have any objection to that degree of religion which is compatible with their general ac-

ceptance with others, or the full enjoyment of their own pleaſures. For a formal and ceremonious exerciſe of the outward duties of chriſtianity may not only be kept up without exciting cenſure, but will even procure a certain reſpect and confidence; and is not quite irreconcileable with a voluptuous and diſſipated life. So far many go; and ſo far "as godlineſs is profitable to the life that *is*," it paſſes without reproach.

But as ſoon as men begin to conſider religious exerciſes not as a decency, but a duty; not as a commutation

mutation for a ſelf-denying life, but as a means to promote a holy temper, and a virtuous conduct: as ſoon as they feel diſpoſed to carry the effect of their devotion into their daily life: as ſoon as their principles diſcover themſelves, by leading them to withdraw from thoſe ſcenes, and abſtain from thoſe actions, in which the gay place their ſupreme happineſs: as ſoon as ſomething is to be *done*, and ſomething is to be *parted with*; then the world begins to take offence, and to ſtigmatize the *activity* of that piety, which had been commended as long as it remained *inoperative*, and had only evaporated in *words*.

But

But when religion, like the vital principle, takes its ſeat in the heart, and ſends out ſupplies of life and heat to every part; diffuſes motion, ſoul, and vigour, through the whole circulation; and informs and animates the whole man: when it operates on the practice, influences the converſation, breaks out into a lively zeal for the honour of God, and the beſt intereſts of mankind: then the ſincerity, or the underſtanding, of that perſon will become queſtionable: and it muſt be owing to a very fortunate combination of circumſtances indeed, if he can at once

once preſerve the character of parts and piety.

But it is a folly to talk of being too holy, too ſtrict, or too good. Where there happens to appear ſome foundation for the charge of enthuſiaſm (as there are indeed too often in good people eccentricities which juſtify the cenſure), we may depend upon it, that it proceeds from ſome defect in the judgment, and not from any exceſs in the piety; for in goodneſs there is no exceſs: and it is as prepoſterous to ſay that any one is too good, or too pious, as that he is too wiſe, too ſtrong, or too healthy: ſince

ſince the higheſt point in all theſe is only the perfection of that quality which we admired in a lower degree. There may be an *imprudent*, but there cannot be a *ſuperabundant* goodneſs. An ardent imagination may miſlead a rightly turned heart; and a weak intellect may incline the beſt intentioned to aſcribe too much value to things of comparatively ſmall importance. Such an one not having diſcernment enough to perceive where the force and ſtreſs of duty lie, may innocently diſcredit religion by a too ſcrupulous exactneſs in points of ſmall intrinſic value. And even well-

meaning

meaning men, as well as hypocrites, may think too much is done when their "mint" and "aniſe" are rigorouſly tithed.

But in obſerving the "weightier matters of the law," in the practice of univerſal holineſs, in the love of God, there can be no poſſibility of exceeding, while there is no limitation in the command. We are in no danger of loving our neighbour *better* than ourſelves; and let us remember, that we do not go beyond, but fall ſhort of our duty, while we love him *leſs*. If we were commanded to

love God with *ſome* of our heart, with *part* of our ſoul, and a *portion* of our ſtrength, there would then be ſome colour for thoſe perpetual cavils about the *proportion* of love, and the *degree* of obedience, which are due to him. But as the command is ſo definite, ſo abſolute, ſo comprehenſive, ſo entire; nothing can be more abſurd than that unmeaning, but not unfrequent charge brought againſt ſerious perſons, that *they are too ſtrict*.

The foundation of this ſilly cenſure is commonly laid in the firſt principles of education, where an early ſeparation

ſeparation is ſyſtematically made between duty and pleaſure. One of the firſt baits held out for the encouragement of children, is, that when they have done their *duty*, they will be entitled to ſome *pleaſure*; thus forcibly disjoining what ſhould be conſidered as inſeparable. And there is not a more common juſtification of that idle and diſſipated manner in which the ſecond half of the Sunday is commonly ſpent, even by thoſe who make a conſcience of ſpending the former part properly, than that, "now they have done

their duty, they may take their pleaſure."

But while chriſtian obſervances are conſidered as taſks, which are to be got over to entitle us to ſomething more pleaſant; as a burthen which we muſt endure in order to propitiate an inexorable Judge, who makes a hard bargain with his creatures, and allows them juſt ſo much amuſement in pay for ſo much drudgery; we muſt not wonder that ſuch low views are entertained of chriſtianity, and that a religious life is reprobated as ſtrict and rigid.

But

But to him who acts from the nobler motive of love, and the animating power of the chriſtian hope, the exerciſe is the reward, the permiſſion is the privilege, the work is the wages. *He* does not carve out ſome miſerable pleaſure, and ſtipulate for ſome meagre diverſion, to pay himſelf for the hard performance of his duty, who in that very performance experiences the higheſt pleaſure, and feels the trueſt gratification of which his nature is capable.

This reprobated ſtrictneſs therefore, ſo far from being the ſource of

diſcomfort and miſery, as is pretended, is in reality the true cauſe of actual enjoyment, by laying the axe to the root of all thoſe turbulent and uneaſy paſſions, the unreſerved and yet imperfect gratification of which does ſo much more tend to diſturb our happineſs than that ſelf-government chriſtianity enjoins.

But all precepts ſeem rigorous, all obſervances are really hard, where there is not an entire conviction of God's right to our obedience, and an internal principle of faith and love

love to make that obedience pleaſant. A religious life is indeed a hard bondage to one immerſed in the practices of the world, the fleſh, and the faſhion. To a perfect chriſtian, it is "perfect freedom." He does not now abſtain from ſuch and ſuch things, merely becauſe they are forbidden (as he did in the firſt ſtages of his progreſs), but becauſe his ſoul has no longer any pleaſure in them. And it would be the ſevereſt of all puniſhments to oblige him to return to thoſe practices, from which he once abſtained with

difficulty, and through the leſs noble principle of fear.

There is not therefore perhaps a greater miſtake than that common notion entertained by the more orderly part of the faſhionable world, that a little religion will make people happy, but that an high degree of it is incompatible with all enjoyment. For ſurely *that* religion can add little to a man's happineſs which reſtrains him from the commiſſion of a wrong action, but which does not pretend to extinguiſh the bad principle from which the act proceeded. A religion

gion which ties the hands, without changing the heart; which, like the hell of Tantalus, ſubdues not the deſire, yet forbids the gratification, is indeed an uncomfortable ſtate. Such a religion, though it may gain a man ſomething on the ſide of reputation, will give him but little inward comfort, if his heart be ſtill left a prey to that temper which produced the evil, even though terror or ſhame may have prevented the outward act.

That people devoted to the purſuits of a diſſipated life ſhould conceive of religion as a difficult and even

even unattainable ſtate, it is eaſy to believe. That they ſhould conceive of it as an unhappy ſtate, is the conſummation of their error and their ignorance: for that a *rational* being ſhould have his underſtanding enlightened; that an *immortal* being ſhould have his views extended and enlarged; that a *helpleſs* being ſhould have a conſciouſneſs of aſſiſtance; a *ſinful* being the proſpect of pardon; or a *fallen* one the aſſurance of reſtoration, does not ſeem a probable ground of unhappineſs; and on any other ſubject ſuch reaſoning would not be admiſſible.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

A ſtranger, from obſerving the faſhionable mode of life, would not take this to be a chriſtian country.—Lives of profeſſing chriſtians examined by a compariſon with the Goſpel.—Chriſtianity not made the rule of life, even by thoſe who profeſs to receive it as an object of faith.—Temporizing divines contribute to lower the credit of chriſtianity —Looſe harangues on morals not calculated to reform the heart.

THE chriſtian religion is not intended, as ſome of its faſhionable profeſſors ſeem to fancy, to operate

operate as a charm, a taliſman, or incantation; and to produce its effect by our pronouncing certain myſtical words, attending at certain conſecrated places, and performing certain hallowed ceremonies: but it is an active, vital, influential principle, operating on the heart, reſtraining the deſires, affecting the general conduct, and as much regulating our commerce with the world, our buſineſs, pleaſures, and enjoyments, our converſations, deſigns and actions, as our behaviour in public worſhip, or even in private devotion.

That

That the effects of ſuch a principle are ſtrikingly viſible in the lives and manners of the generality of thoſe who give the law to faſhion, will not perhaps be inſiſted on. And indeed the whole preſent ſyſtem of faſhionable life is utterly deſtructive of ſerioufneſs. To inſtance only in one particular amuſement, which is generally thought inſignificant, and is in effect ſo vapid, that one almoſt wonders how it can be dangerous: it would excite laughter, becauſe we are ſo broke into the habit, were I to inſiſt on the immorality of paſſing one's whole life

life in a crowd. But thoſe promiſcuous myriads which compoſe the ſociety, falſely ſo called, of the gay world; who are brought together without eſteem, remain without pleaſure, and part without regret; who live in a round of diverſions, the poſſeſſion of which is ſo joyleſs, though the abſence is ſo inſupportable; theſe, by the mere force of inceſſant and indiſcriminate aſſociation, weaken, and in time wear out, the beſt feelings and affections of the human heart. And the mere ſpirit of diſſipation, thus contracted from invariable habit, even detached from

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all its concomitant evils, is in itſelf as hoſtile to a religious ſpirit, as more poſitive and actual offences. Far be it from me to ſay that it is as criminal; I only inſiſt that it is as oppoſite to that heavenly mindedneſs which is the eſſence of the chriſtian temper.

We know that in the mingled maſs which celebrate the orgies of diſſipation, are many amiable and well-inclined hearts, whom nothing but the tyranny of faſhion could have driven thither. But let us ſuppoſe an ignorant and unprejudiced ſpec-

ſpectator, who ſhould have been taught the theory of all the religions on the globe, brought hither from the other hemiſphere. Set him down in the politeſt part of our capital, and let him determine, if he can, except from what he ſhall ſee interwoven in the texture of our laws, and kept up in the ſervice of our churches, to what particular religion we belong. Let him not mix entirely with the moſt flagitious, but only with the moſt faſhionable; at leaſt, let him keep what they themſelves call *the beſt company*. Let him ſcrutinize into the manners,

cuſtoms, converſations, habits, and diverſions, moſt in vogue, and then infer what is the eſtabliſhed religion of the land.

That it could not be the Jewiſh he would ſoon diſcover; for of rites, ceremonies, and external obſervances, he would trace but ſlender remains. He would be equally convinced that it could not be the religion of old Greece and Rome; for that enjoined reverence to the Gods, and inculcated obedience to the laws. His moſt probable concluſion would be in favour of the

Mahometan faith, did not the exceſſive indulgence of ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed, in an article of intemperance prohibited even by the ſenſual Prophet of Arabia, defeat that conjecture.

How would the petrified enquirer be aſtoniſhed, if he were told that all theſe were of a religion meek, ſpiritual, ſelf-denying; of which poverty of ſpirit, a renewed mind, and non-conformity to the world, were ſpecific diſtinctions!

When he ſaw the ſons of men of

fortune, ſcarcely old enough to be ſent to ſchool, admitted to be ſpectators of the turbulent and unnatural diverſions of racing and gaming; and the almoſt infant daughters, even of wiſe and virtuous mothers (an innovation which faſhion herſelf forbad till now), carried with moſt unthrifty anticipation to the frequent and late protracted ball; would he believe that we were of a religion which has required from theſe very parents, a ſolemn vow that theſe children ſhould be bred up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"

When he beheld thoſe nocturnal clubs, ſo ſubverſive of private virtue and domeſtic happineſs, would he conceive that we were of a religion which in expreſs terms "exhorts young men to be ſober-minded?"

When he ſaw thoſe magnificent and brightly-illuminated ſtructures which decorate and diſgrace the very precincts of the royal reſidence (ſo free itſelf from all theſe pollutions); when he beheld the nightly offerings made to the demon of play, on whoſe cruel altar the fortune and happineſs of wives and children are offered up with-

without remorſe; would he not conclude that we were of ſome of thoſe barbarous religions which enjoin unnatural ſacrifices, and whoſe horrid deities are appeaſed with nothing leſs than human victims? If any thing could add to his aſtoniſhment, it muſt be to obſerve, in ſome more private temples of this demon, that the fair ſacrifice is often a voluntary one, ſelf offered, and is at once both prieſteſs and victim.

Now ought we not to pardon our imaginary ſpectator, if he ſhould not at once conclude that all the

various deſcriptions of perſons, above noticed, profeſſed the chriſtian religion; ſuppoſing him to have no other way of determining but by the conformity of their manners to that rule by which he had undertaken to judge them? We indeed ourſelves muſt judge with greater latitude, and candidly take the preſent ſtate of ſociety into the account; which, in ſome few inſtances perhaps, muſt be allowed to diſpenſe with that literal ſtrictneſs, which more peculiarly belonged to the firſt ages of the Goſpel.

But as this is really a chriſtian country,

country, profeſſing to enjoy the pureſt faith in the pureſt form; it cannot be unreaſonable to go a little farther, and enquire whether chriſtianity, however firmly eſtabliſhed, and generally profeſſed in it, is really practiſed by that order of faſhionable perſons, who, while they are abſorbed in the delights of the world, and their whole ſouls devoted to the purſuit of pleaſure, yet ſtill arrogate to themſelves the honourable name of chriſtians, and occaſionally teſtify their claim to this high character, by a general profeſſion of their belief

in, and a decent compliance with, the forms of religion.

This enquiry muſt be made, not by a compariſon with the ſtate of chriſtianity in other countries (a mode always fallacious, whether adopted by nations or individuals, is that of comparing themſelves with thoſe who are ſtill worſe); nor muſt it be made from any notions drawn from cuſtom, decency, or any other human ſtandard; but from a ſcripture view of what real religion is; from any one of thoſe ſtriking and comprehenſive repreſentations of it, which

which may be found condenſed in ſo many ſingle paſſages of the ſacred writings.

Whoever then looks into the Book of God, and obſerves its prevailing ſpirit, and then looks into that part of the world under conſideration, will not ſurely be thought very cenſorious, if he pronounce that the conformity between them does not ſeem to be *very* ſtriking; and that the one does not very evidently appear to be dictated by the other. Will he diſcover that the chriſtian religion is ſo much as pretended to be made

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the *rule of life* even by that decent order who profeſs not to have diſcarded it as an object of faith? Do even the more regular, who neglect not public obſervances, conſider chriſtianity as *the meaſure of their actions?* Do even what the *world* calls religious perſons employ their time, their abilities, and their fortune, as talents for which they however confeſs they believe themſelves accountable: or do they in any reſpect live, I will not ſay up to their profeſſion (for what human being does ſo?), but in any conſiſtency with it, or even with an eye to its predominant

nant tendencies? Do perſons in general of this deſcription ſeem to conſider the peculiar doctrines of the Goſpel as any thing more than a form of words, neceſſary indeed to be repeated, and proper to be believed? But do they conſider them as neceſſary to be adopted into a governing principle of action?

Is it conſiſtent to declare in the ſolemn aſſemblies that they are "miſerable offenders," and that "there is no health in them," and never in their daily lives to diſcover any ſymptom of that humility which ſhould

ſhould naturally be implied in ſuch a declaration?

Is it reaſonable, or conſiſtent with good ſenſe, earneſtly to lament having "followed the deſires of their own hearts," and then deliberately to plunge into ſuch a torrent of diſſipations as clearly indicates that they do not ſtruggle to reſiſt *one* of them? I dare not ſay this is hypocriſy, but ſurely it is inconſiſtency.

"Be ye not conformed to this world," is a leading principle in the book they acknowledge as their guide.

guide. But after unreſiſtingly aſſenting to this, as a doctrinal truth, at church; how abſurd would they think any one who ſhould expect them to adopt it into their practice! Perhaps the whole law of God does not exhibit a ſingle precept more expreſsly, more ſteadily, and more uniformly rejected. If it mean any thing, it can hardly be conſiſtent with that mode of life emphatically diſtinguiſhed by the appellation of *faſhionable.*

Now would it be much more abſurd (for any other reaſon but becauſe it

it is not the cuſtom) if our legiſlators were to meet one day in every week, gravely to read over all the obſolete ſtatutes, and reſcinded acts of parliament; than it is for the order of perſons of the above deſcription to aſſemble every Sunday, to profeſs their belief in, and ſubmiſſion to, a ſyſtem of principles, which they do not ſo much as *intend* ſhall be binding on their practice?

But to continue our enquiry.—There is not a more common or more intelligible definition of human duty, than that of "Fear God, and keep

keep his commandments." Now, as to the firſt of theſe inſeparable precepts, can we, with the utmoſt ſtretch of charity, be very forward to conclude that God is really "very greatly feared," in ſecret, by thoſe who give too manifeſt indications that they live "without him in the world?" And as to the latter precept, which naturally grows out of the other—without noticing any of the flagrant breaches of the moral law, let us only confine ourſelves to the allowed, general, and notorious violation of the fourth commandment, and then enquire what apology

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can be offered for this, by believers at leaſt, who ſcruple not to allow the authority of that book, which declares, among many other alarming denunciations, that the wilful and habitual offender in any one point is guilty of the breach of the whole law.

Shall we have reaſon to change our opinion, if we take another divine repreſentation of the ſum and ſubſtance of religion, and apply it as a touchſtone in the preſent trial—"Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c. and thy

thy neighbour as thyſelf?" Now, judging by inference, do we ſee many public proofs of that heavenly-mindedneſs which would be the inevitable effect of ſuch a fervent and animated dedication of all the powers, faculties, and affections of the ſoul to him who gave it? And, as to the great rule of ſocial duty expreſſed in the ſecond clauſe, do we obſerve very much of that conſiderate kindneſs, that pure diſintereſtedneſs, that conſcientious attention to the comfort of others, eſpecially of dependants and inferiors, which might be expected from thoſe who enjoy the privilege

of ſo unerring a ſtandard of conduct? a ſtandard which, if impartially conſulted, muſt make our kindneſs to others bear an exact proportion to our ſelf-love: a rule in which chriſtian principle, operating on human ſenſibility, could not fail to decide aright in every ſuppoſable caſe. For no man can doubt how he ought to act towards another, while the correſponding ſuggeſtions of conſcience and feeling concur in letting him know how he would wiſh, in a change of circumſtances, that others ſhould act towards him.

Or

Or ſuppoſe we take a more detailed ſurvey, by a third rule, which indeed is not ſo much the principle as the effect of piety—"True religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction, and to keep himſelf *unſpotted from the world.*" Now if chriſtianity inſiſts that obedience to the latter injunction be the true evidence of the ſincerity of thoſe who fulfil the former, is the beneficence of the faſhionable world *very* ſtrikingly illuſtrated by this ſpotleſs purity, this exemption from the pollutions of the world,

which is here declared to be its infallible ſymptom?

But if I were to venture to take my eſtimate with a view more immediately evangelical; if I preſumed to look for that genuine chriſtianity which conſiſts in "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt;" to inſiſt that, whatever *natural* religion and *faſhionable* religion may teach, it is the peculiarity of the *chriſtian* religion to humble the ſinner and exalt the Saviour; to inſiſt that not only the groſsly flagitious, but that *all*, have ſinned; that *all* are by nature in a ſtate of condemnation;

tion; that *all* ſtand in need of mercy, of which there is no hope but on the Goſpel terms; that eternal life is promiſed to thoſe *only* who accept it on the offered conditions of "faith, repentance, and renewed obedience;" —if I were to inſiſt on ſuch evidences of our chriſtianity as theſe; if I were to expreſs theſe doctrines in plain ſcriptural terms, without lowering, qualifying, diſguiſing, or doing them away; if I were to inſiſt on this belief, and its implied and correſponding practices; I am aware that, with whatever condeſcending patience this little tract might have been ſo

far perufed, many a faſhionable reader would here throw it aſide, as having now detected the palpable enthuſiaſt,, the abettor of "ſtrange doctrines," long ago conſigned over by the liberal and the polite to bigots and fanatics. And yet, if the Bible be true, this is a ſimple and faithful deſcription of chriſtianity.

After having, however, juſt ventured to hint that ſuch are indeed the humbling doctrines of the Goſpel, to which alone eternal life is promiſed; I ſhall, in deep humility, forbear enlarging on this part of the ſubject,

which has been exhauſted by the labours of wiſe and pious men in all ages. Unhappily, however, the moſt awakening of theſe writers are not the favourite gueſts in the cloſets of the more faſhionable chriſtians; who, when they happen to be more ſeriouſly diſpoſed than ordinary, are fond of finding out ſome middle kind of reading, which recommends ſome half-way ſtate, ſomething between paganiſm and chriſtianity, ſuſpending the mind, like the poſition of Mahomet's tomb, between earth and heaven: a kind of reading which, while it quiets the conſcience

by being on the ſide of morals, neither awakens their fears, nor alarms their ſecurity. By dealing in generals, it comes home to the hearts of none: it flatters the paſſions of the reader, by aſcribing high merit to the performance of certain right actions, and the forbearance from certain wrong ones; among which, that reader muſt be very unlucky indeed who does not find ſome performances and ſome forbearances of his own. It at once enables him to keep heaven in his eye, and the world in his heart. It agreeably repreſents the readers to themſelves as amiable perſons;

perſons; guilty indeed of a few faults, but never as condemned ſinners under ſentence of death. It commonly abounds with high encomiums on the dignity of human nature; the good effects of virtue on health, fortune, and reputation; the dangers of a blind zeal, the miſchiefs of enthuſiaſm, and the folly of being "righteous over much:" with various other kindred ſentiments, which, if they do not fall in of themſelves with the corruptions of our nature, may, by a little warping, be eaſily accommodated to them.

Theſe

Theſe are the too ſucceſsful practices of lukewarm and temporizing divines, who have become popular by blunting the edge of that heavenly tempered weapon, whoſe ſalutary keenneſs, but for their "deceitful handling," would oftener "pierce to the dividing aſunder of ſoul and ſpirit."

But thoſe ſeverer preachers of righteouſneſs, who diſguſt by applying too cloſely to the conſcience; who probe the inmoſt heart, and lay open all its latent peccancies; who treat of principles as

as the only certain ſource of manners: who lay the axe to the root, oftener than the pruning knife to the branch; who inſiſt much and often on the great leading truths, that man is a fallen creature, who muſt be reſtored, if he be reſtored at all, by means very little flattering to human pride—ſuch as theſe will ſeldom find acceſs to the houſes and hearts of the more modiſh chriſtians; unleſs they happen to owe their admiſſion to ſome ſubordinate quality of ſtyle; unleſs they can captivate, with the ſeducing graces of language, thoſe well-bred readers, who are childiſhly

childiſhly amuſing themſelves with the garniſh, when they are periſhing for want of food; who are ſearching for poliſhed periods, when they ſhould be in queſt of alarming truths; who are looking for elegance of compoſition, when they ſhould be anxious for eternal life.

Whatever comparative praiſe may be due to the former claſs of writers, when viewed with others of a leſs decent order, yet I am not ſure whether ſo many books of frigid morality, exhibiting ſuch inferior motives of action, and ſuch moderate

rate repreſentations of duty, have not done religion much more harm than good; whether they do not lead many a reader to enquire what is the loweſt degree in the ſcale of virtue with which he may content himſelf, ſo as barely to eſcape eternal puniſhment; how much indulgence he may allow himſelf, without abſolutely forfeiting his chance of ſafety: what is the uttermoſt verge to which he may venture of this world's enjoyment, and yet juſt keep within a poſſibility of hope for the next: adjuſting the ſcales of indulgence and ſecurity with ſuch a ſcrupulous

equilibrium, as not to loſe much pleaſure, yet not incur much penalty.

This is hardly an exaggerated repreſentation: and to theſe low views of duty is partly owing ſo much of that bare-weight virtue with which even chriſtians are ſo apt to content themſelves: fighting for every inch of ground which may poſſibly be taken within the pales of permiſſion; and ſtretching thoſe pales to the utmoſt edge of that limitation about which the world and the Bible contend.

But

But while the nominal chriſtian is perſuading himſelf that there can be no harm in going *a little farther*; the real chriſtian is always afraid of going too far. While the one is debating for a little more diſputed ground, the other is ſo fearful of ſtraying into the regions of unallowed indulgence, that he keeps at a prudent diſtance from the extremity of his permitted limits, and is as anxious in reſtricting as the other is in extending them. One thing is clear, and it may be no bad indication by which to diſcover the ſtate of a man's heart to himſelf: while he is

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contending for this allowance, and ſtipulating for the other indulgence, it will ſhew him that, whatever change there may be in his life, there is none in his heart; the temper remains as it did; and it is by the inward frame rather than the outward act that he can beſt judge of his *own* ſtate, whatever may be the rule by which he undertakes to judge of that of another.

It is leſs wonderful that there are not more chriſtians, than that chriſtians, as they are called, are not better men: for if chriſtianity be not true, the

the motives to virtue are not high enough to quicken ordinary men to very extraordinary exertions. We ſee them do and ſuffer every day, for popularity, for cuſtom, for faſhion, for the point of honour, not only more than good men do and ſuffer for religion, but a great deal more than religion requires them to do. For her *reaſonable ſervice* demands no ſacrifices but what are ſanctioned by good ſenſe, ſound policy, right reaſon, and uncorrupt judgment.

Many of theſe faſhionable profeſſors even go ſo far as to bring their

right faith as an apology for their wrong practice. They have a commodious way of intrenching themſelves within the ſhelter of ſome general poſition of unqueſtionable truth. Even the great chriſtian hope becomes a ſnare to them. They apologize for a life of offence, by taking refuge in the ſupreme goodneſs they are abuſing. That "God is all merciful," is the common reply to thoſe who hint to them their danger. This is a falſe and fatal application of a divine and comfortable truth. Nothing can be more certain than the propoſition, nor

more

more deluſive than the inference: for their deduction implies, not that he is merciful to ſin repented of, but to ſin continued in. But it is a moſt fallacious hope to expect that God will violate his own covenant, or that he is indeed "all mercy," to the utter excluſion of his other attributes of perfect holineſs, purity, and juſtice.

It is a dangerous folly to reſt on theſe vague and general notions of uncovenanted mercy; and nothing can be more deluſive than this indefinite truſt in being forgiven in

our *own* way, after God has clearly revealed to us that he will only forgive us in *his* way.

But the truth is, no one does truly truſt in God, who does not endeavour to obey him. For to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in oppoſition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and yet look for his acceptance, would not, in any other inſtance, be thought a reaſonable ground of conduct; and yet it is by no means as uncommon as it is inconſiſtent.

But

But the life of a diſſipated chriſtian ſeems to be a perpetual ſtruggle to reconcile impoſſibilities: it is an endeavour to unite what God has for ever ſeparated, peace and ſin; unchriſtian practices with chriſtian obſervances; a quiet conſcience and a diſorderly life; a heart full of this world, and an unfounded dependance on the happineſs of the next.

CHAP. VII.

View of those who acknowledge christianity as a perfect system of morals, but deny its divine authority.—Morality not the whole of religion.

AS in the preceding chapter notice was taken of that description of persons who profess to receive christianity with great reverence as a matter of faith, who yet do not pretend to adopt it as a rule of con-

conduct; I ſhall conclude theſe ſlight remarks with ſome ſhort animadverſions on another ſet of men, and that not a ſmall one, among the decent and the faſhionable, who profeſs to think it exhibits an admirable ſyſtem of morals, while they deny its divine authority; though that alone can make the neceſſity of obeying its precepts binding on the conſciences of men.

This is a very diſcreet ſcheme: for ſuch perſons at once ſave themſelves from the diſcredit of having their underſtanding impoſed upon

by a ſuppoſed blind ſubmiſſion to evidences and authorities; and yet, prudently enough, ſecure to themſelves, in no ſmall degree, the reputation of good men. By ſteering this middle kind of courſe, they contrive to be reckoned liberal by the *philoſophers*, and decent by the believers.

But we are not commonly to expect to ſee the pure morality of the Goſpel very carefully transfuſed into the lives of ſuch objectors. And indeed it would be unjuſt to imagine that the precepts *ſhould* be moſt ſcrupu-

ſcrupulouſly obſerved by thoſe who reject the authority. The influence of divine truth muſt neceſſarily beſt prepare the heart for an unreſerved obedience to its laws. If we do not depend on that pardon and acceptance which chriſtianity offers, we ſhall want the beſt motive to the actions and performances which it enjoins. A lively belief *muſt* therefore precede a very hearty and complete obedience. We are told, on the very beſt authority, that truth ſanctifies the heart: and the ſame authority adds, that the "word of God is truth." That command therefore,

for

for inſtance, to ſet "our affections on things above," will operate but faintly, till that ſpirit from which the command proceeds touches the heart, and convinces it that no human good is worthy of the entire affection of an immortal creature. An unreſerved faith in the promiſer muſt precede our worthy performance of any duty to which the promiſe is annexed.

But as to a ſet of duties enforced by no other motive than a bare acquieſcence in their beauty, and a cold conviction of their propriety, but

impelled by no obedience to his authority who impoſes them; though we know not how well they might be performed by pure and impeccable beings, yet we know how they commonly *are* performed by frail and diſorderly creatures, fallen from their innocence, and corrupt in their very natures.

Beſides, nothing but a conviction of the truth of chriſtianity can reconcile thinking beings to the extraordinary appearances of things in the Creator's moral government of the world. The works of God are an enigma,

enigma, of which his word alone is the ſolution. The dark veil which is thrown over the divine diſpenſations in this lower world, muſt naturally ſhock thoſe who conſider only the ſingle ſcene which is acting on the preſent ſtage; but is reconcileable to him who, having learnt from revelation the nature of the laws by which the great Author acts, truſts confidently that the cataſtrophe will ſet all to rights. The confuſion which ſin and the paſſions have introduced; the triumph of wickedneſs; the ſeemingly arbitrary diſproportion of human conditions, accountable on

no ſcheme but that which the Goſpel has opened to us—have all a natural tendency to withdraw from the love of God the hearts of thoſe who erect themſelves into critics on the divine conduct, and yet will not ſtudy the plan, and get acquainted with the rules, ſo far as it has pleaſed the Supreme Diſpoſer to reveal them.

Till therefore the word of God is uſed as "a lamp to their paths," men can neither truly diſcern the crookedneſs of their own ways, nor the perfection of that light by which they

they are directed to walk. And this light can only be seen by its own proper brightness; it has no other medium. Till therefore "the secret of the Lord" is with men, they will not truly "fear him;" till he has "enlarged their hearts" with the knowledge and belief of his word, they will not very vigorously "run the way of his commandments." Till they have acquired that "faith without which it is impossible to please God," they will not attain that holiness without which no man can see him.

And indeed if God has thought fit

fit to make the goſpel an inſtrument of ſalvation, we muſt own the neceſſity of receiving it as a divine inſtitution, before it is likely to operate very effectually on the conduct. The great Creator, if we may judge by analogy from natural things, is ſo wiſe an œconomiſt, that he always adapts, with the moſt accurate preciſion, the inſtrument to the work; and never laviſhes more means than are neceſſary to accompliſh the propoſed end. If therefore chriſtianity had been intended for nothing more than a mere ſyſtem of ethics, ſuch a ſyſtem ſurely might have been pro-

duced

duced at an infinitely leſs expence. The long chain of prophecy, the labours of apoſtles, the blood of ſaints, to ſay nothing of the great and coſtly ſacrifice which the goſpel records, might ſurely have been ſpared. Leſſons of mere human virtue might have been delivered by ſome ſuitable inſtrument of human wiſdom, ſtrengthened by the viſible authority of human power. A bare ſyſtem of morals might have been communicated to mankind with a more reaſonable proſpect of advantage, by means not ſo repugnant to human pride. A mere ſcheme of con-

conduct might have been delivered, with far greater probability of ſucceſs, by Antoninus the emperor, or Plato the philoſopher, than by Paul the tent-maker, or Peter the fiſherman.

Chriſtianity, then, muſt be embraced entirely, if it be received at all. It muſt be taken, without mutilation, as a perfect ſcheme, in the way in which God has been pleaſed to reveal it. It muſt be accepted, not as exhibiting beautiful parts, but as preſenting one conſummate whole, of which the perfection ariſes from coherence and dependence,

from relation and consistency. Its power will be weakened, and its energy destroyed, if every caviller pulls out a pin, or obstructs a spring with the presumptuous view of new-modelling the divine work, and making it go to his own mind. There is no breaking this system into portions of which we are at liberty to choose one, and reject another. There is no separating the evidences from the doctrines, the doctrines from the precepts, belief from obedience, morality from piety, the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we pro-

feſs chriſtianity at all, if we allow the Divine Author to be indeed unto us "wiſdom and righteouſneſs," he muſt be alſo "ſanctification and redemption."

Chriſtianity, then, is aſſuredly ſomething more than a mere ſet of rules; and piety, though it never pretended to be the ſubſtitute for a good life, is indiſpenſably neceſſary to its acceptance with God. The Goſpel never offers to make religion ſuperſede morality, but every where clearly proves that morality is not the whole of religion. Piety is not

only neceſſary as a *means*, but is itſelf a moſt important *end*. It is not only the beſt principle of moral conduct, but is an indiſpenſable and abſolute duty in itſelf. It is not only the higheſt motive to the practice of virtue, but is a prior obligation; and abſolutely neceſſary, even when detached from its immediate influence on practical goodneſs. Religion will ſurvive all the virtues of which it is the ſource; for we ſhall be living in the nobleſt exerciſes of piety, when we ſhall have no objects on which to exerciſe many human virtues. When there will

will be no diſtreſs to be relieved, no injuries to be forgiven, no evil habits to be ſubdued; there will be a Creator to be bleſſed and adored, a Redeemer to be loved and praiſed.

FINIS.

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